

THE RIDING MASTER

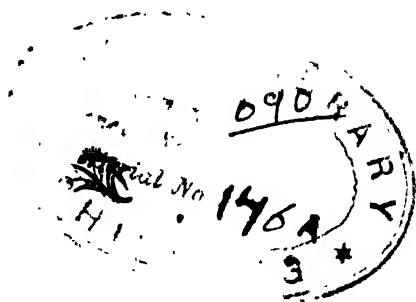
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By the same Author

**A LONELY LITTLE LADY
THE GUARDIANS OF PANZY
THE STORY OF EDEN
URIAH THE HITTITE
CAPTAIN AMYAS
THE PATHWAY OF THE PIONEER
AS YE HAVE SOWN
MAFOOTA
ROSE-WHITE YOUTH
TROPICAL TALES**

THE RIDING MASTER

BY
DOLF WYLLARDE



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To
"SIR DENNIS"
AND ALL DEAR HORSES

ERRATUM

Page 301, for “*tufters*” read “*leaders*.”

The Author apologises for the misprint to all sportsmen.

THE RIDING MASTER

CHAPTER I

"Whenever the moon and stars are set,
Whenever the wind is high,
All night long in the dark and the wet
A man goes riding by.
Late in the night when the fires are out,
Why does he gallop and gallop about?"

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

THE Riding Master put his foot into the stirrup, and swung himself on the mare's back even as she started across the School. The stableman who had led her in got out of the way, and retreated through the door that led from the School into the stables, leaving the master to argue with his mount; for she was a novice to the work, and a new horse looked askance at the confined space with its many horrible corners that were such excellent practice, albeit the School was the largest in London and allowed room for half-a-dozen riders.

Still, a school is not the free world, or even a stable, and it took some of the men six months in consequence to accustom a horse to the place. The Riding Master took three. Under the iron patience of his handling, his pupils—horses as well as humans—came to do the thing he wished, only half consciously to themselves. Nervous horses liked it: it gave them courage. Nervous riders were forced to endure it: whether they liked it or no they never knew until they learned to miss the authority.

The mare was not only new to the School, she was still a green horse and wanted educating. The Riding Master took her round the tan at a walking pace, riding with his knees, and forcing her up to the corners, from which she tried again and again to shy into the more open space. It was not an exciting or diverting occupation, save that a new horse, or a new pupil, was as unbroken ground and had the interest of the unknown. Round and round, round and round, the mare treading as if on hot bricks because she felt the strange elasticity of the tan beneath her feet, the rider sitting her with a rather fine effect of which he appeared unconscious. It is quite probable that he never troubled himself about his appearance at such moments. A really good-looking man or woman looks once in the glass where one with less undeniable beauty looks three times. Nature's darlings are not vain: they have become too used to the fact of their own physical success.

Had the Riding Master been cursed with an imagination he might have been struck with the spots of liquid sunlight falling on the old walls of the School, which were panelled with brown wood four feet high. For the light, falling through the glass roof, took a mellow tone at this hour in the afternoon, and lent the place a picturesque semblance of being a study in different browns—brown tan, brown hurdles, brown panelling, with the shadows turned to brown also in contrast to the sun. All along the upper walls the opened shutters let in a grateful draught of air, though the light only filtered in through the skylight to give that softened, misty effect that one sometimes catches in Morland's studies of stable life.

But the Riding Master, like Gallio, cared for none of these things. He was thinking that it might be as well

to put a gag on the new horse, which had a tendency to bore, and also that she was more the build of a bank-jumper than a shire-hunter. The Riding Master had no great connection for stag hunters, and a horse for a flying country fetched a better price. Still, they sold to a large public from these stables, and the mare would look well once she learned to carry her head (the hands holding the reins had been mechanically nagging gently on the snaffle to this end), and it was better on the whole than a star-gazer. He could ride her for a while in the School and give her manners——

“ A lady for her lesson, sir ! ”

“ Who is it ? ” said the Riding Master, and dismounted, patting the mare’s neck to reassure her. He was fond of horses, but he did not rightly belong to the groom people, who live with them and love them, and so it was the stableman who took the bridle and soothed her. “ Mrs Devereux, sir,—Woa, lady ! Woa, my pretty ! ”

“ Bring me Capulet and Patience,” said the Riding Master with hardly a second of hesitation during which he went over the fifty or sixty riding horses in the stall, remembered which were out and which must rest, besides a mental note that Mrs Devereux was a new pupil and he did not know her capabilities. He had learned to think so quickly that it seemed an instinctive action as much as his handling of the reins.

As this was a first lesson he had told the groom to bring the learner’s horse—a depressed bay, with a head like a fiddle and an air of caring very little whether he got there to-day or to-morrow. So many pupils had been hoisted on to his back, where they had hung on by the reins until they had bumped their way to victory (of sorts), that his temper had hardened with his mouth. He looked round at Mrs Devereux as she put her foot into

the groom's hand, and his gloomy expression said, "One more!—and eleven stone at that, I reckon."

The new pupil was not in truth a light weight. She was a tall woman of fleshy build, with a blank handsome face and thick fair hair conventionally knotted under the bowler hat. She was so obviously nervous that she would have broken through the foot-rest had the groom allowed it; but practice made him the equal even of her blunder, and she went up on Patience and was fitted into the saddle for all the world as though she were a big doll.

"Stirrup right, madam? Is your habit straight?" Mrs Devereux said, "Yes, thank you," in a level tone only shaken by physical fear, and the groom mechanically began the lesson by sorting the reins for her and putting them into her hands. Everybody employed about the School lent their aid in some sort to help the pupil, who might never be conscious of it.

The Riding Master had mounted Capulet while his inclusive glance was upon Mrs Devereux, and rode up alongside before the groom had ceased leading Patience gently round the School. "All right, Blackleigh!" he said in a brief aside, and as the man disappeared through the door to the stables he turned and looked hard at his pupil as if she interested him.

"Ever ridden before, madam?" he said cheerfully. He had been at work since seven that morning, at which hour a lady had come to the School to learn to ride astride: and from that time to the present lesson he had been dealing with all stages of incompetence, not infrequently accentuated by a confirmed conceit on the part of the learner.

"No," said Mrs Devereux briefly, her eyes upon her horse's ears and her hand clutching the reins like a bunch of ribbons. "At least not since I was a child—I have

not been on a horse for eighteen years." She hesitated a moment, flushed uncomfortably, and seemed to decide to say nothing more.

"I daresay you will soon get used to it again," said the Riding Master with gentle encouragement. "Take the reins in both hands, please. Right shoulder back and left hip forward. Try to get your balance, and let your body go with the horse." Sometimes, but not always, he spoke with a little lisp that was too elusive to be called a blemish. After a while Mrs Devereux found herself listening for it mechanically: but he generally mastered the tendency.

Round and round and round, at a walking pace, in silence, save for the inevitable orders. It was almost as monotonous as training the new mare. Once or twice he looked hard again at his pupil, for her utter unresponsiveness puzzled him. She was trying to do as she was told, but evidently with no pleasure to herself—with no interest in the exercise even. The distressed flush had lingered in her cheeks, and once he almost thought that her eyes filled with tears. Either she was agonisingly nervous, or else the whole lesson was taken against the grain. He had seen children like this, because under edict to learn given by their elders: but not a grown person in whose hands lay the decision whether they should ever mount a horse or no.

In her own mind Mrs Devereux was going over a conversation of a few weeks since, brief but stinging. It had come of an irresistible outburst on her own part against the increasing loneliness of her life. She was in her set, but not part of it. Yet being fine of mental hearing she heard life laughing all round her, and might not stretch out her hands. Her husband went his own way and left her to the distractions she did not possess.

"Can't we sometimes be seen together—just for the look of things?" she heard herself saying bitterly. The words seemed to set themselves to the rhythm of the horse's hoofs—pad! pad! on the tan. "You never go anywhere with me now!" and the hoofs echoed "You never go anywhere with me now!"

"We are not in the honeymoon stage, and we have hardly reached that of Darby and Joan!" he had retorted.

"I don't ask for sentiment—only respectability."

"You are respectable enough for both of us—heaven knows!" She remembered the little impatient jerk of his hands on the sporting paper he was reading. He had beautiful hands, long and sensitive, and was as fastidious about them as the rest of his person. His irritability was so familiar that it seemed a part of him also. "I think you might forbear to attack me like this," he had added. "I would extend a like tolerance to you."

"Ainslie!"

"Well, what in heaven do you want me to do?"

"I only asked to be seen with you sometimes." (How sullen her own voice sounded in remembrance, echoed in the horse's hoofs!)

Then he had laughed—that had stung as nothing else.

"Well, my dear, it is rather impossible for me to dance attendance on you, for you never do anything like other women. You don't play bridge—you don't care for motoring—you can't ride——"

"I could learn——"

"I should advise you to go and take lessons then," he had said, and yawned. "At present you are not in the swim, and I do not feel inclined to stand out of everything in order to countenance you!"

Then he had tossed aside the paper, still impatiently, and gone—whither she could guess. If she did not play

bridge, or rise at seven to ride in the Park, other women did. A dull pride had stood in the way of her taking his ironical advice for seven days: then she had sat down to a study of cards as seriously as she had faced other problems of her life. And a little later she had arranged for riding lessons.

As long as Ainslie Devereux did not know, she would be spared the scourge of his amusement: and when did he ever care to know of her pursuits? . . .

"Right shoulder back, pleath, madam!" said the Riding Master for the fiftieth time that day.

Mrs Devereux jerked stiffly in the saddle and pulled the right rein with her whole body, causing her horse to turn meekly half round, uncertain as to whether that were her intention, or if he were to stop.

"No! no! You mustn't stiffen your arms like that—keep your shoulder back, but don't tighten your reins." The Riding Master laughed as he spoke. He was quite a young man, and being perfect in his profession he sometimes found the antics of his pupils too much for his gravity. It was a kindly amusement however, and his trained eyes saw that Mrs Devereux had lost her first terror. "Now, we will trot," he said, with the same confidence in his power over her unused muscles as over her shrinking nerves. "Shorten your reins—now rise!" He urged Patience into a long swinging trot, and with his hand under Mrs Devereux's elbow forced her into taking the motion. Eighteen years out of the saddle leave time for the bones to set and the muscles to tighten. Mrs Devereux was not only stiff, she could not get her balance to the master's liking. "Give me your reins, and take your foot out of the stirrup," he said, forbearing to use the more familiar "iron" in case she should not understand. She did understand, and trembled.

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" I am afraid I shall come off ! " she said anxiously.

" No, you won't, madam." He looked into her face again with that hard gaze from his young eyes, and added quietly, " I won't let you fall."

Mrs Devereux yielded up the reins and sat square. She could not rise without the iron, but deprived of her reins she slackened the tension of her body and moved more with the horse. It was a fine torture that her teacher could not understand, but she had paid him the magnificent compliment of trusting her physical self to his judgment, and had not outwardly flinched. Only, she kept her puzzling silence and would not talk, not alone from lack of breath but because of her torpid reserve. When the Riding Master said, " I think that will do for this afternoon," and she reined up Patience in the middle of the School, he had a feeling that he had helped in a very serious effort, both physical and mental, rather than given a lesson.

" Take your reins in your right hand—now the elastic first ; now take your foot out of the stirrup—now your knee from the pommel. Gather your skirt in your left hand—now jump, lightly, on your toes."

Mrs Devereux came down too solidly, there was no spring in her ; but she showed no further sign of fear until the Riding Master had accompanied her up to the gallery overlooking the School, and sat down at the round table in the centre to the appointment-book.

" And when will you ride again, madam ? "

" Oh, I don't know—to-morrow—no, not to-morrow—the day after ? "

He turned quickly, looking up at her with that quick reading of her mind that seemed to her almost supernatural. She could hardly remember his face when she

had left the School, save that he was a fair man with grey eyes: but he conveyed a distinct impression of power to her memory.

"Look here, madam, you muthn't be afraid that you can't learn," he said firmly. "You will trot in a few lessons, and you won't fall. The oftener you can manage to ride at first the easier it will be, as you are out of practith."

"I will ride the day after to-morrow then," said Mrs Devereux, and the Riding Master made the appointment.

He sat still, looking at the entries and thinking, while his late pupil changed her habit. During the wait the Assistant Master came into the gallery, and called him to the telephone; but he was standing at the door leading into the long dull street when Mrs Devereux reappeared, and put her into a hansom. She had neither a maid nor her carriage with her, and gave him the address of a shop in Piccadilly from which she intended to walk home—he knew it by instinct. It had been a curious lesson altogether.

As Mrs Devereux was driven away, another hansom came clattering down the street, past the arches of the School through whose open shutters one heard the sound of hoofs, or the impatient rattle of a chain. The two cabs passed each other, and the occupants were face to face. As the second cab drew up at the School door the Riding Master stepped forward again to put his hand over the wheel, and help his next pupil to alight. She was a very pretty girl of twenty or thereabouts, and she began to chatter long before she was out of the cab, in a way that brought the amusement back to the well-cut corners of the Riding Master's lips.

"Thanks! I know I'm late—please don't cut my lesson. I couldn't help it. Father wanted me to go to

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Harrod's about some liqueur glasses—and I thought it was so near, and the beasts kept me there. Oh, by the way, that was Mrs Ainslie Devereux that I passed in the hansom ? ”

“ Yes, miss.”

The young lady opened her merry blue eyes, and looked at the Riding Master with eager curiosity. Her own name was Miss Dulcimer Vane-Hurst, but to everyone about the School she was (behind her back) “ Miss Dulcie.” Even and especially the grooms called her “ Little Miss Dulcie,” and they knew that the tall pleasant-spoken gentleman who sometimes appeared in the gallery when she had her lessons was Sir Digby Errington, and grinned accordingly. For Sir Digby was obviously devoted, but as he only appeared when there was no one to chaperon Miss Dulcie but her maid, and as there was some passing of tips to assure a meeting, it was equally obvious that there were difficulties in his way. Gossip filtered from the lady's-maid to the waiting-woman who was in charge of the dressing-rooms, and from her to the stables. Sir Digby had had expectations of coming into a cousin's estates, but the cousin, on his deathbed, had acknowledged to having married unknown to his family, and after his demise the widow had been found, and, worse still, had proved to have a son to inherit in Sir Digby's stead. Since he was become ineligible Miss Dulcie's lover was not encouraged by her family ; but they still met—at the Riding School for instance—where nobody was supposed to know anything, and even the grooms knew so much that they watched the affair with hearty sympathy.

Miss Dulcie did not look like a love-born maiden, hopelessly parted from the man she loved, anyhow. She was sparkling with life, and very much taken up with the

momentary interest as she alighted from the cab. "But I say, Mrs Devereux isn't going to have lessons!" she said breathlessly.

"Yes, miss."

The girl's face was a mixture of comic amazement, puzzlement, and some curious reticence that began to strike the Riding Master as always connected with Mrs Devereux.

"Well, I hope for her horse's sake that she is not so heavy in the saddle as she is socially!" said Miss Dulcie drily, turning to the staircase leading to the gallery. "I won't be ten minutes," she called over her shoulder. "My maid's not here, is she? All right—Rivers will help me." (Rivers was the assistant at the School, who was in charge of the dressing-rooms, and a sworn ally of Miss Dulcie's.) "Do let me have Flying Feet this afternoon! I can always jump better." And the bright face and laughing voice vanished.

But if the Riding Master could have kept the impression of Miss Dulcie's eyes in his mind he would have found them still full of curiosity and reticence, and would have recognised the influence of Mrs Ainslie Devereux.

CHAPTER II

"What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side,
'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you — poor, sick, old ere your time —
Nearer one whit your own sublime.
Than we who have never turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride."

ROBERT BROWNING.

MISS DULCIE was as good as her word. It was not ten minutes later that she emerged into the gallery again in her habit, as correctly attired as for the Park, but with no hat on her bright head. Of necessity she began chattering at once, to Rivers who followed her out, and the Assistant Master who was making some reference to the appointment-book.

"I sha'n't wear a hat—it's so hot, and it doesn't matter in the School, does it?" ("No, miss," from the Assistant Master, for which she hardly waited.) "My maid's going to join me,—please let her sit in the Royal Box,—I always call that the Royal Box, Rivers, and it makes me so nervous when papa is there, or my brother!" She pointed with her riding stick to the central portion of the gallery which was curved outwards after the lines of an opera box over the School, with seats for visitors. On the extreme right of the gallery a small door opened on to a second flight of steps which led straight down on

to the tan. Pupils entered the School from here, but the horses came in from the other side, where stood the stables. Miss Dulcie ran down the steps and across the School, without waiting for the horse to be brought to her. As this was to be a leaping lesson two of the stablemen were in attendance beside the riding masters, both of whom would be mounted.

"Please put me up, Blackleigh—oh, how horrid! They've given me Tearaway, and I *did* ask for Flying Feet! I can't jump a bit on Tearaway—she is all over the place——"

Miss Dulcie pouted and the grooms laughed. "She needs more handling, miss!" said Blackleigh as he settled her habit with proper pride. She had a little soft round figure that seemed to melt into the lines of a tight-fitting bodice, and even the linen coat that she was wearing to-day could not spoil it. There was no necessity to tell Miss Dulcie to keep her right shoulder back or to sit straight: her carriage was as spirited as Tearaway's, and Blackleigh looked at her with open admiration while she still chattered.

"There! Let me button the apron. This is a beast off a skirt—I shall never get on with it. It has taken a dislike to me, and when my clothes do that I may just as well give them away. Do you ever find that?" she said, turning to the Assistant Master. "Inanimate things are just as cross-grained as people at times. I've had to give my maid heaps of clothes because they simply *wouldn't* do anything I told them!"

The Assistant Master laughed. "I suppose it really was that your dressmaker hadn't made them fit, wasn't it?" he said. He was a literal young man.

"No, indeed! I should like to see her dare! My clothes always fit, or I won't take them," flashed Miss

Dulcie, a little indignant. "No, it's simply the things themselves—if they love me they'll help me to look nice, and I'll wear them to the very last. But if we are antagonistic they have to put up with Janet." Then she turned to the Riding Master himself. "Why have you given me Tearaway?" she demanded, as the animal in question put her ears back and looked askance at the hurdles. "You know she refuses nine times out of ten."

"Because I want you to use your hands, miss," said the Riding Master coolly. "If I give you Flying Feet you simply sit still and he does all the work. With this mare you are bound to pull her about and get her to do what you want."

"Teddy—my brother, you know—says I shall never have decent hands," said Miss Dulcie rebelliously. They were riding gently round the School, the girl with her reins in both hands to check the vagaries of her horse, the man watching her with his trained intentness.

"I saw Major Vane-Hurst when I was in the Park this morning, miss," remarked the Riding Master, as Miss Dulcie wheeled and backed and began to get Tearaway into control.

"Did you?" she said, looking up with quick interest. "Was he riding?"

"No, miss, at least he was with his regiment. I think a squadron of the Blacks must have been serving on a royal guard, and he was with them."

"They are always hot and cross after a royal guard, but Teddy looks a darling in uniform, anyway. Of course I don't tell him so—if you tell a man he looks nice he never thinks about anything but himself again, and it leaves one's own appearance so out in the cold."

The Riding Master threw up his chin with a little

movement peculiar to him and laughed. The movement he could check, and did, so that it suggested a horse checked in tossing its head: but the laugh was beyond his control. Perhaps he thought that Miss Dulcie need never fear any lack of attention to her personal appearance. All he said, however, was "Now, mith, are you ready?"

"You remind me so much of a dentist when you say that!" said the girl, with a mutinous flash in her eyes. "Don't you know how they always say 'Are you ready?' and you set yourself in the chair and wait for—ugh!" She shook her small shoulders with a shudder. "Only one knows what to expect there, and one never does in jumping on this animal.—You know quite well that I am talking to put off trying her at the hurdles," she added candidly. "Oh, do give me a lead, or send Durban over first!" (Durban was the Assistant Master.)

"No, miss. I want you to do it by yourself."

There was no hint of capitulation or compromise in that tone, and Miss Dulcie had learned by sad experience that argument or coaxing were of no avail with the Riding Master. For just one second she felt that she hated him—yes, from his fair cropped head to the riding boots resting so unnecessarily on the irons, for he could ride as well or better without—and then she gathered up her reins and touched Tearaway with her heel.

The mare cantered down the long stretch of the School nearly up to the low hurdle, swerved and swung round with her rider, but not far. Miss Dulcie was on her mettle, and her small hands were stronger than they looked. She brought Tearaway round again, and rode her harder at the obstacle, holding her in to it this time, and using stick and heel to guide as well as her hands.

The mare took the jump that time, but with no liking for it, and the master praised.

"Very good indeed. Now the bigger hurdle. Look sharp, Blackleigh!"

"She wants to refuse every time—I can feel her fighting," said Miss Dulcie, as the recalcitrant Tearaway turned from the stick and backed, trying to get her rider against the wall or into the corner. Finding that this was impossible she proceeded to rear, and then ensued a struggle between the girl and the horse, while the stablemen stood by and applauded, and the Riding Master threw his orders across the School. He did not go to the assistance of his pupil, for he believed in people having confidence in themselves and he could only inspire that by showing it for them. At the end of ten minutes Miss Dulcie, flushed and really indifferent to everything but conquering her horse, took Tearaway over again in a triumphant rush, and pulled up for a minute, panting. There is nothing much more exciting in all the scope of teaching than a leaping lesson. Though they were unaware of it, all three, pupil and masters, had been shouting at each other at the top of their voices.

"Don't let your horse run out, miss!" said the Riding Master earnestly, pushing up beside Miss Dulcie in the centre of the School. His eyes were alert with his intense desire that his pupil should do what he wished, and had Miss Dulcie been Mrs Devereux this would have been just the same. He put all his personal emphasis—and it was great—into his work.

"She pulls me so when it comes to the corners," complained Miss Dulcie, moving her shoulders as if her arms ached. "She *will* try to make for the hurdle before I want to turn her."

"Well, there's room enough for a good canter, even

if you don't get the full length of the School," said the Riding Master, looking down the long reach. "Now Durban shall go over and show you."

The Assistant Master wheeled his horse and cantered down the School, turning easily at the end in a way that was enviable. Miss Dulcie sat motionless beside the Riding Master, and watched with all her eyes while the horse swept eagerly up to the obstacle, was lifted over, and landed without touching it. "Ah! I wish I could do that!" she said.

But the Riding Master appeared less satisfied. "Do it again, Durban!" he said quietly.

"I didn't touch him, Mr Lancelot!" said the Assistant Master, for he understood.

"Let him see his work—you distract his attention if you pull at him," said the Riding Master significantly.

Miss Dulcie watched in charmed silence for the space of three jumps; then her youth bubbled into conversation again as inevitably as a spring bubbles out of its dark cavern. Silence was a dark cavern to Miss Dulcie.

"Is Mrs Devereux learning to jump?" she said with that odd touch of curiosity in her voice.

The Riding Master looked round at her with a simultaneous tightening of his lips. "No, miss. She is only learning to ride—at present," he said. Then, after a second, for he did not readily bestow information, "She telth me she learned as a child, but has not ridden for eighteen yearths."

"I shouldn't have been surprised if she had not ridden or another eighteen! I wonder if her husband knows?" She caught herself up. "Can *that* be the reason?"

"Does her husband ride, miss?"

"Oh yes, you must have seen him often enough in the Row. You or Durban are often there riding with

pupils, for I have seen you. Ainslie Devereux is a small man with a wiry figure, and is always beautifully turned out. He is rather fair, and keen-looking."

"I think I know him, miss. He rides a grey——"

"Yes, he does."

"And is generally with a dark lady?"

Miss Dulcie's face flushed with something more than the exercise. "Yes, he does," she said again, with a touch of resentment in her voice. Youth has a prerogative of resentment against sins not its own. "She's a horrid woman—but very pretty. A Mrs Errington——"

The Riding Master did not speak for a moment. The name was so familiar that he paused lest he should tread on delicate ground. "I think she is a friend of Lady Herring's," he said, and his lips closed again in the old line, while his eyes still followed and noted Durban's manœuvres with the black horse.

"Yes, she knows all that set," said Miss Dulcie with a little disgusted toss of her head. "Lady Herring and Mrs Jack Chateris, and the Hawley Towers people. But the Devereuxs are a kind of relation to the Beaumans. I think Mrs Devereux is a cousin of Lady Malbrook's. You teach the Malbrook children, don't you?"

"Yes, miss." There was interest alight in the Riding Master's eyes now. They were detached from Durban at last, and fixed upon Miss Dulcie. She found it quite explainable—he knew Lord Malbrook's two little girls, Lady Viva and Lady Sacharissa Beaman.

"Nice pickles of pupils they must be!" she remarked, half scandalised and half laughing. "Isn't Sweetie *dreadful*? She is the very naughtiest little girl I ever saw."

Lady Sacharissa was more usually known as Lady Sweetie by a mistaken world. Her age was seven, but

the strength of her character defied mere years. She had already made herself felt in that circle of society where she found herself, to the breathless interest of her parents and guardians.

"She is rather too daring on horseback at present," said the Riding Master, beginning to smile. Then the smile relaxed the clean corners of his mouth, and he threw up his head and laughed in a way that reminded Dulcie that he was quite a young man. "She told me one day that Satan sometimes took possession of her, and that she was a 'demon'!"

"Well, so she is!" said Miss Dulcie, half exasperated. "She ought to be put in the corner half her life! But Lord Malbrook is so fond of her he will hardly have her punished."

"Her sister is a very quiet little girl in comparison, miss."

"Oh, Viva. Yes, but she is rather an odd child, too. She flies into such senseless rages over nothing. And then she is so sorry that she cries till she is ill."

The Riding Master said nothing. In a heart that was very big for children he was pitying the little sensitive face he knew so well—the face that flushed and paled too easily, while Lady Viva gazed up at him from wonderful brown eyes. She was not so amusing as Lady Sweetie in her wicked ways, but he had no more conscientious or eager pupil than Lady Viva at ten years old.

"I think they will both make fine horsewomen some day, miss," he said gently. "Mrs Devereux is their cousin, then?"

"Of sorts—a cousin several times removed. She is totally unlike Lady Malbrook." The Riding Master did not answer. But he was certainly listening, and

that satisfied Miss Dulcie. "Mrs Devereux will never be a success, socially. Do you know, she would often be left in a corner with no one to speak to if it were not for my brother? Teddy says he is so sorry for her—I am not so good-natured. I can't be sorry for people who are dull. I want to hit them. It seems somehow like their own fault."

"It's temperament," said the Assistant Master unexpectedly. He had stopped near them, and was adding a cloud of steam from his horse to the lengthening shadows of the afternoon. "Some horses are dull like that too—look at Patience! He's as sullen as he can be at times."

"It isn't times with Mrs Devereux—it's always!" said Miss Dulcie. She looked a solemn warning at both men. "You'll see—she'll never say a word to you through her lessons, unless she thinks she's falling off."

But the Riding Master seemed to think that the digression had gone on long enough. He turned his horse towards the hurdles. "Now, miss," he said, and led. It was beautiful to see him hold the animal together, ride him when he came within a few lengths of the obstacle, and clear it with a clean spring. Man and horse came down together as if made in one piece. The Riding Master's body moved with the balance of the jump, but while he sat as if part of the saddle his head and shoulders dropped back a trifle in landing. Miss Dulcie jarred, to her intense annoyance, and even Durban was flung too far forward owing to his lighter weight and the clumsiness of the hunter he was riding. The stablemen doubled the hurdles and they did it again, and then the Riding Master got up on Tearaway in Miss Dulcie's place and rode side-saddle to show her where she failed. She did not like failing, but she did

like seeing good horsemanship, and being a generous little lady, she said so.

At the end of half-an-hour there was more fog in the School, for the horses were in clouds of steam, and the riders looked as if they were hardly less heated. But the Riding Master's zeal was unabated, and he went on lecturing and teaching, as if unconsciously to himself, while Miss Dulcie dismounted, and even as they went up the steps to the gallery, where the young lady's maid sat in grim chaperonage in that outward curve which Miss Dulcie called the "royal box." The woman rose on their appearance and departed into the dressing-room to await her charge and help her out of her habit. Miss Dulcie was listening to the Riding Master, and hardly noticed anyone else for the moment.

"I'm going cub-hunting in the autumn," she said. "Do you think I can ride enough?"

"Yes, miss, if you don't lose your head, and forget everything you've learned. I want you to think of what I have told you when you go away from here. It will all come back to you. But there will be no one to remind you. And cub-hunting isn't the best sport for a beginner, for if you do get a run the hedges are all blind——"

"I don't think I could forget—you've rubbed it into me so!" said Miss Dulcie with a funny little laugh. Then she turned a sudden rosy red—but her eyes had left the Riding Master. "I won't be a minute," she said. "Janet is here—she'll help me to change."

She ran past the Riding Master and into the dressing-room. He had not had to turn to see to whom she made her last speech. The tall, plain young man who was standing by the round table in the centre of the gallery had been there before, and the School took him rather as a

matter of course. The Riding Master was used to seeing a blush go past him. He said good-afternoon to Sir Digby Errington, and stood and talked to him while Miss Dulcie changed.

Janet, the maid, accompanied the young couple ostensibly, as they left the School, but the Riding Master heard Miss Dulcie say, "Let's walk home—part of the way at least," and he judged that Janet was not unamenable to tips. Miss Dulcie nodded a good-evening to him, and ran down the staircase that led to the entrance of the School and the street, Sir Digby following. Beyond the School they passed out of the Riding Master's life, into the quiet glow of the June evening, where they put the consenting Janet into a cab, and themselves set out on foot. But the groom who stood aside at the entrance to let them pass grinned and touched his hat appreciatively. Miss Dulcie had slipped her hand into her lover's arm as simply as his own sweetheart might have done.

"Rather a decent sort, that Riding Master," said Sir Digby, tucking the little hand closer to his side. There was nobody to see them in the long blank road outside the School, or from the shuttered arches past which they were walking, up towards the Knightsbridge Road.

"He's a splendid teacher," acknowledged Miss Dulcie, with dignity. "And a good rider. But he has one weakness—do you know he gets almost intoxicated with power!"

"Isn't that a sign of strength rather than weakness?"

"No, it is weakness, because it goes to his head—it does indeed! I suppose it's partly due to the fact that he's a little tin god on wheels in his School, and they all seem to love him rather, and call him 'Mr Lance,'

and 'Mr Lancelot' with affectionate familiarity. But he does like ordering people about."

"Very good for you to have to obey!" said Sir Digby teasingly, because the pout was so delicious on her young lips that he was fain to prolong it.

"It's rather hard to be treated like a child when you are grown up! 'Who told you to hold your reins like that, miss? I'm sure I didn't.'" (She imitated the strong command of the Riding Master's voice very successfully.) "And do you know one day he said that he had told me a thing three times, and I ought to have remembered!!!"

Sir Digby laughed outright. "Well done, the Riding Master! So you ought. Poor little girl! Was she very insulted?"

"Well, I did begin to think that riding masters were hateful people!"

"He's not the usual type. They are usually seedy 'gentlemen' or broken-down steeplechasers. This chap looks healthy. I never saw a riding master before without a touch of colour in his nose!"

"Oh, he's not *that* kind of person," said Miss Dulcie, with a dainty little sniff of disgust. Then she paused. "I sometimes wonder what he thinks of us all," she said, with some curiosity. "A lot of interesting things happen in connection with his School, if he only knew it, and he might get hold of broken bits of a story. Do you know, Digby, I met Mrs Devereux there to-day, and she is going to have lessons."

"The deuce! (I beg your pardon, little girl!) But, by Jove! The plot thickens. Can she have heard of my cousin's daily parade in the Row with her victim?"

"I don't know. Don't call that woman your cousin—she was only Gerald Errington's wife, no relation of

yours, thank goodness. I can't think why every man loses his silly head about her." (Sir Digby did not lose his silly head at this moment, anyway. He had the wisdom to be quite dumb.) "She is pretty, I suppose, but she is so openly scandalous."

"She has done us a bad turn, anyway. Dulcie, I don't like this uncertainty between us, and meeting haphazard. I wish I had some decent reason to speak to the Colonel definitely about you."

The girl's bright face clouded, but her eyes shone with a steadier light, and gave a sudden revelation of purpose behind her youth. A young woman is often a very curious contrast of malleable exterior and inward determination, and Miss Dulcie's innocent face was misleading as regarded the strength of her will once her heart was engaged.

"I don't think papa has any real objection, even to our being definitely engaged," she said thoughtfully. "Only, when all this upset came about the property, he thought he ought to be rude and talk about your prospects. Have you any prospects, Digby?"

"Precious few, I'm afraid," said the young man ruefully. "I've about seven hundred a year of my own—and you are used to seven thousand!"

"Being used to a thing doesn't matter," said Miss Dulcie with superb ignorance. "I've no doubt I could get accustomed to the hundreds. Only, I should hate to see you poor! Can't you do anything to make money?"

"Not beginning at seven and twenty, very well. I'm awfully sick now that I didn't work harder at Sandhurst, but it seemed such rot when I was bound to come into Gerald's place. I only needed to learn a land agent's job."

"Besides, the army isn't the way to earn a living—it's only the way to spend one," said Miss Dulcie, with a conviction gathered from her brother's commission in the Blacks. "No, we must think of something much more mercantile and less attractive. I suppose you have to learn to cheat people before you are a stock-broker? And I should hate the Stock Exchange. You would have to wear such flashy ties, otherwise you wouldn't look real."

"I'd rather go into Lloyds," said Sir Digby, with a rather dejected air. "The shipping Johnnies, y'know. A fellow I knew told me that you can make quite a decent show there if you have a little capital, and learn the business by working up from the bottom—among the clerks, and all that, until you got to be an underwriter."

Miss Dulcie sighed and looked covertly at the tall figure striding beside her. In spite of being plain, Sir Digby had the undeniable breeding of race, and her ideas of a "clerk person" were vaguely embodied by a head and shoulders inside a little window frame, at railway stations and the like.

"Wouldn't it be very hard work?" she said, and there was a small tremble in the eager voice.

"No," said the young man flushing, and speaking almost shortly, "not if it were for you."

He looked down at the girl with a sudden hungry tenderness in his eyes that she could not meet. Her own fell, and she turned her head half restlessly under the nakedness of the truth he had spoken. It was almost a relief to her when they emerged into Knightsbridge High Road and hailed a hansom, though once in the cab it was more possible to sit hand in hand and to think at least of kisses to be given some time. She was a little sobered by the glimpse she had had of her own value in a

man's eyes—a little humbled too, for it seemed a very precious thing that he should want to do uncongenial work for her and count nothing distasteful in the probation during which he served. They hardly spoke on the way home, until they were almost in the street where Colonel Vane-Hurst's house stood, and there was Janet waiting for them at the corner, to regain possession of her charge. Then Sir Digby turned to the girl before he helped her out, and spoke with the same earnestness.

"Will you stick to me, Dulcie?"

"Yes," she said simply; but it was a promise.

"In spite of everything?"

"In spite of anything," she amended.

The man's face brightened. It never occurred to him to take oath in his turn. His allegiance, of course, could not waver. After all, his sex are not so much deceivers as self-deceivers ever.

The girl was, at any rate, to keep her word.

CHAPTER III

" She rides in the Park on a prancing bay,
She and her squires together ;
Her dark locks gleam from a bonnet of grey,
And toss with the tossing feather.

Too calmly proud for a glance of pride
Is the beautiful face as it passes :
The cockneys nod to each other aside,
And the cockscombs lift their glasses ! "

GEORGE MEREDITH.

A MAN once remarked to a fellow-member in White's that Mrs Errington's pedigree was as suspicious as Wagpaw's, and her running as unexpected : and the saying went abroad. For Wagpaw won the National the year that Mrs Errington came home from a vague corner of South America to take possession of Errington Manor, and his performance was as upsetting to all calculations as hers. He had been bred by an eccentric foreigner who had only a few horses in training and had never won a big race ; and the colt, at three years old, had been pronounced so impracticable that he could not be regarded seriously. Later he had made his appearance in the hunting field (he was a gelding), and after two seasons' work it had been suggested that he should run for the Hunt Cup. The extreme ease with which he secured this trophy led to his being taken back into the stable and put to serious work, but his chance for the National was not looked upon with any favour even by his owner, and it was only the boy who rode him who remembered his staying powers across a stiff and difficult country. After

behaving very badly at the post, the gelding began to settle to his work, went over the awful course at Aintree, and finished with something in him, while better-bred and more highly trained horses were knocked out of it. The National is never a very certain race for backers, but certainly Wagpaw's performance shook the faith of old turfites in all traditions and experience.

Mrs Errington's career was not unlike the chaser's. She had been born in Ireland of a race as handsome and shiftless as any typical of that country. Owing to a cloud—the first on her stormy horizon—her father had emigrated to South America when his family was still in the nursery, and became lost to the sight of his creditors, though to their memories incredibly dear. The reckless, unscrupulous Irishman died when his daughters were fifteen and twelve years old respectively, and his wife having preceded him the girls were left to the mercy of a world which is never too favourable to beautiful women. Eileen, the elder, had married at sixteen, and Jewel, the younger, lived with her until in the course of a few years there drifted across her path that eccentric traveller and Bohemian, Gerald Errington.

To all intents and purposes Jewel was a Spanish-American, for she had left Ireland at the age of three, and never seen another country but the one of her adoption: but she had kept the beauty of her race and her native land, and already the combination had caused quarrels in her honour between the hot-headed descendants of old Spanish families, and had nearly, if not quite, led to her abduction, according to rumour. Gerald Errington married the girl for the sake of her face—and that it was a legal marriage there was no doubt from the proof produced—but then he proceeded to treat her as he had treated the grisettes of Paris, the geishas of Japan, and

the light maidens of every country where he had roamed. He behaved as only an English gentleman with vicious traditions could have behaved and kept the respect of his own world, and had there been any other trespass that he might have committed against his young wife he would certainly have committed it. The gamut of neglect and cruelty having been run through, however, there was nothing left for Mr Errington to do but to die, highly respected as to his social position, and only censured for his erring bachelorhood. On his deathbed he wrote formally to his solicitors informing them both of his wife's existence and where she was to be found, and added offhandedly that as he died intestate it was their business to discover what portion of his personal property reverted to her. This was a bolt from the blue, for though his heirs, administrators, and assigns, had never counted on his not marrying—some day—they had not conceived that he had already married and neglected to acknowledge his wife for some ten years.

The discovery of Mrs Errington was not difficult. She herself wrote to the solicitors upon obtaining the news of her husband's death, and signified that she was arriving in England with her nine-year-old son as fast as boat and train, would bring her, to claim such property as had been left, on her arrival. This was a new version of the case, for Mr Errington had made no mention of the boy; but it was only as his natural guardian that Mrs Errington could take possession of the Manor and lands that had been in the family for three or four centuries. By virtue of this son she upset many people's anticipations, for failing a direct heir the Manor went to a cousin, Sir Digby Errington, who from a man too poor for his position would have been transformed into an eligible suitor for

Miss Dulcie Vane-Hurst, and looked forward to an early marriage.

It would have been justifiable in Miss Dulcie to have borne a personal grudge against the woman who had disinherited her *fiancé*, and made the engagement an indefinite and discouraged thing almost as soon as she had begun to hope that the Errington estates were coming to Sir Digby. But to do her justice her animosity to Mrs Errington arose from less personal and more conventional reasons. The widow arrived in England armed with all her credentials and accompanied by a Chilian nurse and the sickly, pallid boy who had ousted all other claimants. There was no denying the existence of Sydney Errington, frail and delicate as it was, or the certificate of birth that proved him the lawful son of Gerald and Jewel Errington. He hardly looked his nine years, and there was nothing of his English father in him—save that, as old Lady Chateris remarked, he was an excellent sermon on a dissipated man's debt to posterity! She went on to say—but nobody listened when Lady Chateris loosened her tongue. Her knowledge of her friends' pasts was as comprehensive as her memory, and both were to be dreaded. Sydney Errington did indeed point a lesson in morals, if his lack of stamina were the result of Gerald Errington's jurid amusements. If he had only been a girl he would not have mattered, for there was Salic law at Errington, and it aggravated matters that he looked so much more fitted to belong to the opposite sex. In his name, however, his mother took possession of the Manor, after a satisfactory interview with the solicitors, and the usual delay caused by letters of administration; and if solicitors were human (which of course they are not) it might be a wondering query as to whether Jewel Errington's

personality had any part in persuading them that it was only scant justice that she should reap some benefit from her unenviable marriage. Even the law is justified in upholding the cause of the widow and orphan, and though the orphan in this case was unprepossessing the widow was not.

Mrs Errington went to the Manor with her son and her olive-skinned nurse, and looked to take her status in the county due to her husband's birth and position. But the county did not like her, and after a little languid calling she was left to enjoy the possession of the estates which she had successfully claimed. She remained there three months, startling the neighbourhood by the most extraordinary feats in the saddle that even a fast hunting country had ever seen. Her riding was so splendid as to be quite unladylike—certainly quite unsuited to an Englishwoman. It was not, properly speaking, sport, for though she rode in the first flight to hounds she managed in some mysterious way to bring a whiff of the circus ring with her; and she was not popular even with the men, who disliked to see a woman flying over the stiffest portion of the hedge in which they had found a gap, and making light of brooks and bullfinches which were a revered tradition in their famous runs. So the joys of the country palled upon the lady of the Manor, and before the hunting was over she had closed the great house and gone up to town, taking the boy and the nurse with her. She had practically collared the field from the time she first started to race, and the victory was too small for her talents, which demanded a larger scope. It was Wagpaw and the Hunt Cup all over again. In London she fared better, because the little house in Mayfair which she rented was a pleasant place to visit according to some taste, and not necessarily public;

so the world went there, unaccompanied by its wife, and such proceedings escaped advertisement in *The Daily Mail*.

Mrs Errington rides into the story on the day following Miss Dulcie's leaping lesson at the School—literally so, for her appearance was on horseback in Rotten Row, where the Riding Master and Durban both included an appearance as part of the day's work. Sometimes the Riding Master rode alone, showing off a blood horse, but more often he took learners who had booked lessons "on the road." His older pupils were comparatively easy to look after, but when it came to children he found the crossing at Hyde Park Corner no light matter. He has been seen with a leading rein in either hand, and his own horse to manage, manœuvring his five charges in and out of the traffic that the police considerably stopped for him, and he must have been easier in his mind when he was safely in the Park, did one of the frisky ponies happen to be carrying Lady Sacharissa Beuman. Fortunately for the Riding Master it was not often that Lady Sweetie's conduct justified such a treat as a ride in the Park. More often her innate wickedness had confined her to barracks—the equivalent in her case being the Riding School.

Miss Dulcie rode in the Park too, sometimes with her father, sometimes only with the groom. On these occasions Sir Digby Errington generally appeared as if he had risen out of Kensington Gardens, and they turned their horses' heads and melted into distance along the tan by the Knightsbridge Barracks, where the Life Guardsmen bring out their chargers to accustom them to motors, and a very interesting dance ensues between the riders and the vehicles in the road. It is surprising what a long time it can take to get from the Kensington end of

the tan to the Corner again, if you have learned how to dawdle. Besides, you can always stop to watch the Guardsmen. Miss Dulcie was in charge of the Colonel on the morning after her leaping lesson, however, and Sir Digby was not in evidence. She was riding a little wiry thoroughbred which suited her better than the difficult Tearaway, and the Riding Master saw her as he came up the Lady's Mile, riding his large chestnut gently and looking about him with his far-seeing grey eyes. He rode twelve stone to his sorrow, and would have thoughtlessly parted with his fighting weight and good broad shoulders if he could have hunted a light thoroughbred. He happened to be alone that day, and Miss Dulcie did not see him as he passed, for she was deep in conversation with two ladies leaning on the railings—a big woman who carried a sunshade, and a small woman who carried two Pekinese dogs, which gradually wriggled out of her arms as she talked.

“It must be awfully hot riding!” this lady was saying just as the Riding Master passed behind Miss Dulcie. “Are those linen coats cool?”

“Fairly—but it isn't hot. There's plenty of air. Did you stay for the last act last night, Lady Malbrook?”

“Oh my dear, I never stay for the end of the opera! I saw the King go down to the omnibus box and begin to enjoy himself, and I marvelled how he *could*! I was sleepy before the second act.”

“But this new woman is rather wonderful!” put in her companion. “I confess she carried me away. I began to cry comfortably, and Ernest Chateris said he never would have come if he had thought I could!”

“It's so easy to cry!” said Lady Malbrook, patting the mare's neck absently. “Since we went back to being

natural all our emotions seem out of control. Sweetie says it's Satan—I daresay she's right."

"How is Sweetie?" said Miss Dulcie half grudgingly. Lady Sweetie's behaviour scandalised her, but she never could resist inquiring into her recent exploits.

"Naughtier than ever!" said Lady Malbrook. "Arthur has been staying with us—George's brother not mine—and she slipped into his room the other morning while he was asleep and pulled the clothes off him. (Don't be shocked, my dear, it's quite a decent story!) The first I heard of it was Sweetie rushing into her father's dressing-room with the information, "Oh, daddy, I've seen the fur on Uncle Arthur's legs!" "

Miss Dulcie bit her lip and turned the colour of a peony: but the next instant she had joined Lady Herring and Lady Malbrook in their burst of laughter.

"Well you know, all my husband's family are so dark!" said Lady Malbrook apologetically. "And their hands and arms are like Esau's. I'm sure I can't blame Sweetie," she added in a tone of reminiscence.

"I hope she will never grow good," said Lady Herring gravely. "It would be a dreadful loss to society. You do not want two Vivas, Muriel."

"Oh, Viva," said Lady Malbrook vaguely. "She isn't very good—she can be tiresome too. But she isn't diabolical, like Sweetie, I confess. I don't always understand Viva, nor does anyone else, really."

"I saw the Chateris children here the other day," remarked Lady Herring idly. "Riding on chargers——"

"On *chargers*!"

"Yes, they must have borrowed their father's horses. And the General rides such large beasts! It was a mercy they were not run away with."

"Nothing ever runs away in the Row!" said Lady

Malbrook discontentedly. "Not even the riders. I can't think why you come in the Park nowadays, Dulcie, it's very unfashionable of you. Except in the Horse Show week there is nobody here but riding schools and the daughters and wives of jobmasters."

"Well, anyhow they are practically professionals themselves, and they can ride!" interpolated Lady Herring with grim amusement. "The people who make me sick are the actresses who come out with last night's paint on their faces, and the writing women who give an exhibition of what the grooms call 'angels' wings' on very hired horses."

"Well, one must get some exercise somewhere," protested Dulcie in self-defence. "And after all you get a mile or so of straight going, with nothing to stop you, and you needn't think about rabbit holes or somebody's else's ground that is forbidden to the public! It seems to me that always happens in England, in the country, unless you are hunting. And I like to ride all the year round."

"Oh, heavens! how the enthusiasm of youth tires one, even to listen to it!" said Lady Herring with a sarcastic shrug of her shoulders. There is a tradition that Lady Herring started life as an American, but she must have successfully got rid of all trace of her origin when she married Sir Rowe, for even her speech does not betray her. Her fondness for the word "tired," and her confession to the malady it conveys, are the only suspicious things about her. She looked down the dappled tan, under the plane-trees, with half-closed eyes that were in truth very weary. "I wish somebody would *do* something!" she said. And then her face almost brightened.

"Ah! here is someone at last!" she said, watching with approving eyes the vagaries of a chestnut horse that was very unlike the usual type of Park hack—a horse

that objected to another cantering past him in every quivering muscle, and trod on hot bricks in imagination, blowing nervously through wide red nostrils. It was the Riding Master, showing his wares like any other tradesman, and both Lady Malbrook and Miss Dulcie bowed to his lifted hat as he passed.

"He teaches the children——"

"He teaches me——"

they said simultaneously in explanation, and Miss Dulcie looked after the chestnut and his rider with frank interest, and Lady Malbrook looked straight in the opposite direction.

"Does he indeed!" remarked Lady Herring, and her voice was a slower drawl than usual. "What a very desirable—horse!"

Lady Malbrook laid her hand on her friend's arm with a grip that might have meant anything. "Sh-sh!" she said significantly. "There are Ainslie Devereux and Mrs Errington!"

"Late!" said Lady Herring briefly. "They generally come in at ten o'clock."

Miss Dulcie turned quickly from looking at the Riding Master to glance at the approaching figures. The Row was so full that for a minute she could not distinguish them, yet they were obvious enough—a man and a woman riding at a foot's pace close to the rails, as if they were jealous of the broad plane-trees whose shady branches were just out of reach. Among the many men who could not ride, the foreigners, and the incompetents who frequent Rotten Row, Ainslie Devereux stood out as one who pre-eminently could: but he was more of the hunting man than the Park rider, and though his hands were so quiet and so close together that it was not noticeable, he held his reins in both, and thrust his feet

further through the irons than those who merely hack. He was a small man, closely knit, with one of those fair faces that can be a little fretful and discontented if their world goes askew. One imagined him catching the end of the little smart moustache between his teeth—it was certain that his brows could take a very angry knit. Not a good man to trifle with—certainly not a man to be tied to a woman's chariot wheels for nothing.

He was talking rapidly, and with a certain animation at the moment, to the lady at his side, and his eyes were fixed so intently on her that it was not possible for him to notice the rest of the world, be it acquainted with him or no. Well, most men thought Mrs Errington worth looking at, even when, as now, her eyes were cast down, and her attention as likely to be given to her horse as to her companion. She had not a good feature in her face, but such as they were the devil had moulded them for the ensnaring of mankind. When she raised her lashes her eyes were neither blue, nor grey, nor green, but no man thought of their colour while he read their wicked promise. And at least her figure was undeniable—a little soft figure that owed nothing to the moulding of corsets, and would be as lovely out of her clothes as in them, There was some magnetism about her that made the man at her side long to touch her—not caress, not even for the pleasures of sense, only a little pathetic desire to feel that she was tangibly there, near him. For she was one of those women of whom no man feels sure, save when actually in his arms, and the tantalising insecurity was as maddening as a spur.

“Did she come from Brazil?” said Lady Herring curiously, her eyes following the movements of the approaching couple with an inscrutable study peculiarly her own.

"Somewhere about there," said Lady Malbrook, picking up one of the Pekinese out of the way of a large Chou who seemed to remember that little dogs are a lawful dish in his part of the world. "There is a convenient vagueness about the exact locality. I think myself it was the Argentine."

"Gerald Errington was fond of the less policed portions of the globe!" said Lady Herring pensively. "I remember his telling me once of some place on a South American river where the tribes were always fighting and so there were never enough men to go round. The native census seems to have been unsatisfactory, and whenever a gun-boat patrolled the river mouth all the officers were expected to get married *pro tem.* to the tribal women! It was part of the international treaty, I think."

"He never talked to me," said Lady Malbrook with a hint of regret. "He was a hateful man of course, and he drank like a fish—but I always felt that his reminiscences might be instructive. Men always tell you the interesting things!"

Lady Herring glanced up, as if inadvertently, at Miss Dulcie, still sitting by the rails and listening with candid interest. "Had Mrs Errington any money?" she remarked smoothly.

"I don't think so—not when Errington married her, anyhow. But some cheapjack investment of her father's is said to have turned out a small fortune lately. Satan certainly looks after his own——"

She broke off to bow civilly to the riders, who were so near that they had to leave the rails to avoid Miss Dulcie. Necessarily they looked up, and acknowledged the brief courtesy from both the ladies standing on the path. Miss Dulcie flushed a little all over her honest, girlish

face, and stared straight between her horse's ears across the green of the Park.

"If Lily were not my own cousin I should cut him," remarked Lady Malbrook drily. "But I should do her as much harm as good. Dear me! I do hope he will keep on the verge of respectability and not force us to do anything!"

"Mrs Errington will see to that—she loves the flesh-pots of Egypt too well to part with them. By the way, Dulcie," she added to the girl, lifting languid eyes to the pretty, troubled face. "You really *oughtn't* to listen to all this!"

"One can't help seeing and hearing, Lady Herring!" Miss Dulcie retorted. "Lady Malbrook, did you know that your cousin was taking riding lessons?"

"What?"

"Yes, indeed, at my School—where I learn to jump, you know. But of course, I forgot, Sweetie and Viva learn there too, so you know it quite well. I met Mrs Devereux there yesterday. I can't think why!"

"Perhaps to start a rival *tête-à-tête* in the saddle!" said Lady Herring with open amusement. "Muriel, do you mind my saying that Lily Devereux is a born fool?"

• "Oh, my dear, don't we all know it! She is not only a fool, but a dull fool. The one sometimes succeeds, but the other is criminally hopeless. I believe your brother is the only man who ever dances with her or takes her in to supper, Dulcie."

"Teddy says he is so sorry for her!"

"Well, most men would be sorry without fatiguing themselves to show it, and one can't blame them. Major Vane-Hurst is the most kind-hearted man I know, for all his blunt habit of telling unpleasant truths. I

believe he would even bring her out here, if she ever learns to ride."

Miss Dulcie made a little involuntary face. "I remember lunching next to Mrs Devereux once," she said wickedly. "It was a hen party. She told me quite seriously that I ought not to eat the salt because it didn't cake, and if salt didn't cake there was glass in it or something injurious! She seemed to me to spoil her whole luncheon by wondering if she would die afterwards."

"For such a good person she is terribly afraid of going to heaven!" said Lady Herring. "But most good people are, I notice. There's the Aurelian minister (Ah, Baron! good-morning!)—did you hear what he said to Ernest Chateris the other day? Ernest was on horseback too, and they met down there under the trees. Ernest rode up to the Baron, and began to ask him a secular question. 'Ach, you must not talk to me now!' said his Excellency. 'I am very beesy riding!'"

"He does look as if he had concentrated all his faculties on his horse's mane," admitted Lady Malbrook. "I suppose if he diverted his attention he would tumble off." In her heart she made a curtsy to the Baron's perspicacity, however. Ernest Chateris was notorious for asking favours.

I have said that Miss Dulcie was in charge of her father this morning, but the Colonel had been engaged in a conversation with one of the Liver Brigade on the further side of the Row while his daughter listened to scandal between Lady Herring and the Countess of Malbrook, in whose society she was, of course, most properly chaperoned, and above suspicion. The old gentleman who had buttonholed the Colonel having at last resumed his sober trot, Miss Dulcie was reclaimed by her father, and rode off with him past the Achilles Statue in the

direction of the Marble Arch. They passed Mrs Errington and Mr. Devereux again in a few minutes, still riding slowly side by side, but a minute later the couple turned back, at the same pace, to the Corner. Mrs Errington had not apparently seen Miss Dulcie, whom she had never encountered near enough for a personal introduction, and no greeting had been exchanged between the Colonel and Devereux, though the younger man's face flushed slightly as they passed.

"Jewel," he said abruptly, "I wish I understood you!"

She looked at him for the briefest moment with something that was more than weariness in her wonderful eyes. Truth to tell this man threatened boredom with his exacting love and its prohibitions. He had passion—it was that that had attracted her at first—but he had also a restraint that irked her, and a standard of conduct for his womenkind that found her constantly transgressing. She could guess at the present moment what his remark prefaced—an accusation of last night's supper party—the Spanish-American Envoy—her own gown as like as not, with its daring lack of convention.

"I am not very difficult to understand," she said, with indecent truth. Her voice was all the sweeter for its Irish softness, caught from early association with her father, and some hint of a foreign tongue in it: but she spoke English with fatal fluency.

"I find you so. Last night for instance, after I had warned you that no other woman——"

"No Englishwoman?" she suggested, putting her gloved hand to her mouth to accentuate rather than hide a yawn. "I am Chilean—practically."

"Do you think the world will consider that?"

"Oh, your world—I am a little sick of it! Some of the frost of your climate has got into your blood, both

men and women—you don't live, you exist by the kind permission of your neighbours ! ”

His eyes flashed stormily, and his face quickened as she loved to see it. “ Is the frost in my blood—since I knew you ? ” he demanded, with a sudden warmth in his whole attitude. “ I think you have seen it melt before your own fire ! Jewel, I wish I could kiss you, just now. You should not talk about coldness from me at any rate.”

“ I am tired of being kissed ! ” said Mrs Errington insolently. “ You think you understand women, Ainslie—you group us all as of types, whereas we are all special cases. You should look upon us as a doctor should a patient—he does not treat a case for fever before he has diagnosed it, just because the last case he prescribed for was fever ! ”

“ The treatment for a woman is the same in the first instance, to enable a man to diagnose at all ! ”

“ How ? ”

“ One takes the temperature ! ”

She raised her eyes to his and laughed, the blood coming up to her pale face. After all he was not boring her, she began to be amused again. If he would only use his tongue for such “ verbal thrust and parry,” and forbear to accuse her—about last night, for instance—the waning attraction might gain a new appetite. She meditated a canter to avoid the obnoxious subject, and tightened her rein as they rounded the Corner and faced the slope of the hill, causing her horse to spring beneath her, as if the electric sympathy between them made him too ready in knowing her mind.

“ Do you want to have a gallop ? The place is clearer now,” Devereux said, seeing the movement. Then, as they crossed the tan, he raised his hat very slightly to

someone riding slowly towards them. Mrs Errington's eyes opened at the salutation, with an inclusive glance that was sheltered the next moment beneath her lashes.

"Who is that?" she said with a curiosity that sounded childish.

"Who? Oh, I see. Only a riding master—fellow who teaches my two little cousins, the Beauman children. Now we're off!"

Mrs Errington hardly seemed to touch her horse, but an instant after she was flying down the tan, between the railings and the trees, some extraordinary grace in her making other riders turn to look after her as though expecting something to happen. For as she had said, she was practically a South American—a Chilian—in the saddle at least. The black habit and severe bowler were too demure: one felt the need of a coloured scarf to sail the wind and plumes to toss from her head. As she swung with the wild rush she did not, curiously enough, see the dip of the tan or the opposite hill, the riders drawing out of her way, or the sunny park—she saw instead a man with square shoulders on a big chestnut horse who fretted against his quiet control, and the direct gaze of two grey eyes that had looked hard at her in passing. As he had raised his hat to Ainslie Devereux he had displayed a square, high forehead that would have suited a scientist, and crisp fair hair with a deep ripple in it despite its close cropping. The vision flew steadily before Mrs Errington all down the Row, for she did not pull up until she was nearly at the Kensington end, but there she turned to her companion neither hot nor out of breath.

"I have been thinking that I should like Sydney—my boy—to learn to ride," she said deliberately, and it

seemed the natural outcome of his last words. "Is this school possible where the Beaumans learn?"

"As much so as any in London, I believe. It's a good idea—it will make Sydney less of a baby. I will arrange it for you."

For a minute Mrs Errington flushed again, perhaps at the veiled impatience over her little son; but the colour died down almost at once, and left the old tired insolence in her face.

"Ah! that will be best—you arrange it for me. And now let us go to the north side. I want a real gallop—one can only pretend here."

She turned out into the road, and trotted on across the Serpentine Bridge, careless whether or no he followed her. There was a gathering cloud on Devereux's face, and he rode in uneasy silence, still brooding on last night's indiscretions of which she would not be warned. Little she cared! Her mind and body seemed concentrated on the motion alone, as she crossed the road again beyond the old powder magazine, and cantered her horse up the less frequented stretch of tan to the north side of the Park where it is legitimate to gallop. Here she touched him at last with whip and heel, and proved the mettle of which he was made, for before her companion could collect himself she had shot ahead, and kept her advantage, a tantalising goal that he could never quite reach, however he might press his own horse. Fortunately they had the galloping ground to themselves, but even with a clear track few women would have cared to go at Mrs Errington's pace. She rode with her hand on her hip at racing speed, regardless of anything or anybody that might cross her path, and not until she was some twenty yards from the spot where the tan dribbles out into the traffic opposite the Marble Arch did she attempt

to pull in her horse, the animal himself being unable to stop for a minute or two, and nearly launching out into the stream of vehicles.

"Jewel, I wish you would not ride at such a pace!" Devereux exclaimed as he rejoined her. "No other woman does it."

"I know," she answered quietly, but there was a little glow on her pale face—hardly a flush—a warmth born of some latent excitement. "That is why I like it."

"One can achieve notoriety with less exposure to bodily harm, if that is what you want," he said grimly.

She looked at him beneath half-drooping lids. "I killed nobody that time!" she said mockingly. "Did you expect to get into trouble with your police?"

"They would have been quite within their rights to stop you."

She laughed again, with some strange exultation in her voice, but she made no further comment, save to say, "I have had enough for the present—I am going home to luncheon now."

"May I come too?"

"No," she said, and looked at him with that extraordinary detached expression, almost as if she were thinking of something else.

"Why not?" he demanded imperiously. It was not his rôle to play the submissive lover to any mistress, however intoxicating.

"Because I don't want you—you have been on the verge of a lecture all the morning, and I would rather avoid it. I want to hear nothing more about last night!"

Ainslie hesitated. He had meant to say a great deal more about last night, and other nights, and to stretch his authority to forbid such supper parties, such licence to other men. The restraint she hated kept him from

acceding to her all at once, though his blood grew hotter as he looked at her.

"If I promise not to lecture, will you let me come? It is so long since we had any time to ourselves—give me this afternoon, and shut everybody else out!"

Mrs Errington shook her head, and smiled with a certain refinement of insolence. "No, thanks—I am rather tired, and I shall go to my room and sleep this afternoon," she said. The provocative, lazy eyes met his, and she laughed outright to see the answering passion in his face: but there was a faint stir of excitement in her own blood. She liked him best like this, when he was maddened into trying to dominate her, and his cold quick intellect was subservient to the beast that lurks in almost all men. The English were a cold nation after years spent in Spanish America, where she had seen men shot or stabbed for her kiss. Devereux might shoot a man for his own honour, but not solely for jealousy of a woman. She was half impatient of the temperament that it had amused and interested her to attract in the first instance.

"You needn't go to your room—you can lie on the sofa. I will be very good and not disturb you," he said quietly, but it was his eyes that really spoke what was in his mind.

"Lying on a sofa is like riding in the Row—only worth while when there's nothing better," she said with a careless shrug. "When I rest I like to take my clothes off and lie between the cool sheets and feel that every inch of me is absolutely quiescent. Ah! . . ." she drew a little breath of anticipatory pleasure.

"Yes, but—Jewel!" he said pleadingly. His eyes begged her. For the minute he was as abject as any

devotee at the shrine of her caprice. But she was no more moved.

"So you see I can't be bothered with you," she said with cruel frankness. She gathered her reins up and made her steaming horse move on in the same occult fashion as before. Then she turned her face and flung a tardy favour over her shoulder.

"You can come and dine on Thursday," she said.

"Thanks—I'm sorry, but I'm engaged," he returned unexpectedly. His tone had changed too: it was no more imploring, not even imperious, it was the offhand courtesy with which he had refused other women's invitations at her bidding. He was angry now in real earnest; the cold, still anger of the English nation for which she found no precedent amongst the ready quarrels and brief vengeance of Spanish America. But she did not greatly care. She nodded her dismissal, and with a brief lift of his hat he turned back along the galloping ground and to his acquaintance amongst the riders, almost as if he returned to an old allegiance and the former gods that he had known before she had bound him in her toils. There was a little air of fatigue about him all at once, as if the whole intimacy with Jewel Errington had wearied his more reserved nature and less primitive impulses.

Mrs Errington rode home alone. She was perhaps a little thoughtful on her homeward way, but it is more probable that she was bored, for she yawned once or twice. There was a presage of disruption in her relations with Ainslie Devereux that had been threatening for some time, and though it did not touch her deeply it would be something to her discredit to lose a slave, according to her creed. She did not want him, but that he should bow his leave before she threw him aside was incredible. Somehow his farewell had sounded a trifle

too real to-day, and his refusal to dine was a new experience. She could punish him for that if it seemed worth while, but to do so meant the retaining him, and her thoughts already saw another mischief in the air. There were many men waiting to take Devereux's place did she choose ; in her experience it was merely a matter of her final pleasure in the selection.

The little house in Mayfair was in a quiet side street, where cabs rattled with a startling obtrusiveness, and a big motor turned gingerly. It was rather bizarrely furnished, for Mrs Errington loved Eastern draperies and the smell of kus-kuss, and mixed up Japan and India and Egypt to satisfy her senses. In the first weeks of her installation there connections and old friends of the Erringtons had called upon her perforce, and had civilly suffered from burnt joss-sticks and Benares ware, as much as from their hostess' bold silk outlines. The womenkind had not come again, though they forbore, even amongst themselves, to do more than find excuses for their behaviour : the men had continued to call, until one or two hats and coats had their own pegs in the footman's memory,

Mrs Errington lunched in her habit in order not to disturb the serious pleasure of the siesta which was to come later. Then she smoked a cigarette and digested her food while her bath was got ready, and at last, with a sigh of faint satisfaction, she went upstairs to the most luxurious portion of the house—her own dressing, bath, and bed rooms. She had no maid of her own. Sydney's dark-skinned nurse was a dual attendant, and waited on her mistress as well as on the little boy. She knelt down to draw the riding boots off Mrs Errington's little feet, and her mistress spoke to her caressingly in Spanish.

" I am very tired, Transito—tired of talking to stupid

men, and looking at plaster-of-Paris women ! They sit like tailors' dummies, and stare at you out of the corners of their eyes. They can't ride and they can't dress. Yoo-oo ! " She opened her red mouth and gaped in the face of the English nation.

" You should go back to Chili, *mi linda* ! There are men to love you there, and horses to ride." Transito threw aside the neat little boots, and drew the stockings from her mistress's feet and ankles as if she had been a child.

" Perhaps—some day—I will. I am beginning to hate England and English people. It is not what we thought it was. The women are all fools, and the men are so easy to get—and yet you never do get them—they leave half of themselves at home, under lock and key. I should like, just once, to feel a real man's arms round me, for they might be good lovers if one could find them raw enough." She laughed with a happy lack of shame. " By the way, Transito, I am going to have Sydney taught to ride."

The woman looked down quickly. She had risen to her feet to disrobe Jewel, and bent her dark face over her a little threateningly. " Have a care, *hijita*, the child is too timid to learn," she said cautiously.

Jewel frowned. " The child *must* learn. I will not have a milksop for a son." The eyes of the two women met, Transito's still warning. " Oh, it will be quite safe. They teach children here in a room—a shut-in place they call a School, with walls all round and cotton wool to fall on ! "

Transito uttered a soft exclamation. " That was not the way you learned ! " she said. " I can see the bright sun and the blue sky when *su señor padre* (your lord father) drove you and what you call the ' plug ' (the pony)

with a long whip, helter skelter over everything ! And when the plug jumped you laughed."

"Sydney must learn to laugh too, though the ponies jump."

Transito's face fell. "It is not the same, *hijita*. Remember he never liked to ride, even when we were at home. Better to leave the child safe with me. We risk less. All depends on him."

"He will not get killed. His teachers will see to that for their own sakes," said Mrs Errington carelessly. She stood up, wrapping a bright-coloured silk round her, and walked lightly through the open door into the bathroom. The warm water swung a little still from the recent mixing in the deep marble basin, and Jewel clapped her hands in quick delight and anticipation. The silk dropped to the floor, a heap of brilliant gold, and behold ! such beauty as Psyche's was for a minute reflected in the great bath before the warm water took her and lapped smoothly about her straight young limbs as if it loved her. She laughed and lay on her back, yielding to the delicious sensation of the moving element like some lithe pantheress sleeking herself in a forest pool ; then she turned on her face to feel it flow over her. And then she sniffed daintily at the soap provided, and lathered herself from top to toe, and lay down again to feel her skin washed free once more, as elementary as the panther again in her enjoyment of a natural pleasure. It was as if the water stroked her.

Transito had put her riding dress out of sight, and turned back the white sheet from the bed when she came back from her bath. The light was darkened through the open windows, and the cool linen wooed her even more than the water had done. Jewel dropped her gorgeous silk again and slipped into bed as the panther

shakes itself free of the water and lies down in the jungle grass. She loved the cleanliness and fragrance of sheets and pillows, and to feel the soft springiness of the bed give under her. Transito had closed the door gently and left her to her repose until she should require to be dressed again ; but for a while Jewel lay with half-closed eyes, faintly smiling, her limbs stretched in a luxury of repose and perfect health. All her hair lay loose about her, in depths and folds of live silk, making her shiver with delight as at the touch of some electric living thing. In colour it was so dark as to look a dull black, save for a red tinge at the roots and hollows of its waving masses that seemed as if it reflected the glow of hell fire. She lay supine, with her hands palm upwards, only her twitching pulses betraying the heave and throb of life in her quiescent body.

Under her half-closed lids she saw the world of men ride by, as she had seen it this morning in the Park. And one man's eyes were thwarted desire—and another's pleaded passion,—and in yet a third was just the first awakening of instinct. Some rode slowly by, and ever and anon one stopped, or else turned in the saddle and looked back. And sometimes one would pass her and look hard into her eyes, even as she had seen. . . .

Her lips parted in a little low laugh that died off in a sigh of pleasure, her lids closed over her visionary eyes, and she slept. But in her sleep she turned a little and yielded as if to strong arms that took her.

CHAPTER IV

"I hear in my heart, I hear in its ominous pulses,
All night the commotion of sinewy, mane-tossing horses—
All day from their cells the importunate neighing and tramping."
LOUISE IMOGEN GUINNEY.

THE Lady Sweetie Beauman had begun the day badly, which, to those who knew her, betokened that the next twenty-four hours would be fraught with incident, and disturbing to the public peace in her immediate neighbourhood. She was not allowed to rise before half-past seven, for nursery breakfast at half-past eight, her exhausted family circle having found that twelve hours or so of Sacharissa awake were quite sufficient for the day and supplied the evil thereof. But on this occasion she defied laws and customs and arose at six—cautiously so as not to disturb nurse, whose sleeping form was a huddled outline of bedclothes on the further side of the nursery. Even Viva was asleep, her arm flung above her head and her delicate brows drawn in the last dreams before the final desertion of slumber. Lady Sweetie slipped the coverings from off her, and climbed actively over the railing of the cot—she was not yet promoted to a bed—until she felt the floor beneath her dangling toes, and stood upright in her nightdress, a glorious vision of intentional wickedness. She was a tall child for her age, and nobly made. The sunny tumbled curls about her eyes were many shades lighter than the eyes themselves, and her level brows drawn downwards at the corners and wide nostrils made her curiously Egyptian in her cast of countenance. She was too pale of skin to look

typically English, and the vivid intensity of the life in her veins was somehow felt through all the solemnity of her upraised expression. There was something almost divine in her lifted face, without a trace of betraying smile, while she plotted unheard-of mischief behind the mask. Mistaken people meeting Lady Sweetie in the street said, "What a delightful child!" They did not see the swift transition in her as they passed, or the tongue she thrust out at them if not suppressed by nurse. The doctor who attended the Beauman nursery called Lady Viva and her sister "the tropical children," and advised great gentleness in rearing them both, and that lessons should not be forced. Lady Malbrook said, "Why? They are as healthy as two puppies! And Sweetie can learn anything—of course I know she's precocious, and full of wickedness!"

"The wickedness is only precocity in another form. Those fits of naughtiness come from a certain irritation of the brain—she will outgrow it, particularly when she finds that it hampers her social success!" said the great physician drily.

Lady Malbrook laughed. Sweetie had already the love of being the prominent object in the picture that made her very naughtiness a pose. At present she did not care whether she were remarkable for goodness or badness, the fascination of being adored rather than feared not having revealed itself to her. She was proud of being described as the naughtiest child in the world by exasperated nurses, and there was no one to cast ridicule on her simple effects and dramatic rôles, which would have been the surest way of curing her. As long as she was noticeable for her naughtiness Sweetie would be bad, in despite of punishment.

She was thinking of the chances for and against her

now, as she stood barefoot beside her cot, holding her breath to notice if nurse stirred. Any great indiscretion on her part meant putting in the corner, or solitary confinement after Viva had begun her ordinary day : if she were only usually tiresome she might be deprived of her egg at breakfast, and restricted to bread and milk alone. In either case it seemed worth it, "Satan," as Sweetie herself said, "having entered into her!" She was fond of referring her peccadilloes to this deity. Her little bare feet made no noise on the thick carpet, and the door was left ajar into the nursery. By stealthy stages she reached the latter room, ran across it and found herself in the passage outside. Only a sleepy scullery-maid or so would be stirring at six o'clock, the more important among the servants rising later, and Sweetie padded downstairs to the landing where her father's dressing-room and bathroom showed inviting doors. She wandered into the latter, looking for mischief, and it being denied to her to turn on taps under ordinary circumstances she proceeded to fill Lord Malbrook's bath for him with cold water. The air however was chilly, even though the month was June, and Sweetie looked about for something to cover her nightdress. She discovered it in her father's dress-coat, laid on the bed in the dressing-room by a sleepy servant at two o'clock that morning and not yet brushed. Sweetie put it on, and found that it trailed on the ground behind her : but it was warm, and she chuckled, returning to her ministrations at the bath on whose polished edge she perched herself.

This was the day of her own and Viva's riding lessons. They went to the School three times a week, and one day at least their lesson was supposed to be taken in the Park, unless Sweetie's own behaviour had lost her the treat. As she sat on the polished mahogany (it was

an old-fashioned bath with a framework) she was pondering whether it was worth while to restrain her feelings before the lesson in order to get out into the road. When the Riding Master had roused her temper either by exacting obedience or an utter imperviousness to her wiles (oh yes ! Sweetie could coax for a boon !) she was in the habit of heaping vituperation upon him by the name of Jones. It is perhaps needless to state that his name was not Jones nor anything like it. But when she had called at him " Ugly old Jones ! Stupid Jones ! " she had found that her nurse not only reproved her, but refused to let her leave the School. Now was it worth while to do as she was told, and not flap her heels against the pony's sides, for the sake of a canter in the Row ? She lingered affectionately upon the thought of new malice, and nurse's face ; on the other hand the ponies could go at a hard canter——

It was at this point that the Lady Sweetie fell into the bath, dress-coat and all. It has been explained that the water was cold, and as she soused and struggled she gave way to a series of sounds expressive of rage, surprise and fright, that brought Lord Malbrook flying into the dressing-room in his pyjamas.

" Sweetie ! " he exclaimed as the wet figure scrambled out of the unlooked-for immersion. " What are you doing, and what is that you have on ? "

" It's your coat—'cos I was cold—and I filled your bath for you—and fell in ! Ugh ! " with a long shudder, her wet curly head bobbing indignantly between each sentence.

Her father could not wait for admonition or punishment while the child shivered like that. He stripped her of coat and nightdress alike, and rubbed her down with his rough bath towels like an athlete. She shrank tenderly

from the friction on her skin at first, but suddenly she began to laugh.

"It's just like being a horse!" she said gleefully. "Gee-up! Kim over now! Get round, you darned old mare!" (slapping her own fat white thigh in delight at the game she had invented). "I say, daddy, it's no use you're going back and waking mother—let's get into bed here, and then you can warm me up! I'll wear your pyjamys."

Lord Malbrook was very tired from a late sitting in the Lords the night before, and ruefully aware that his dress-coat was a ruined heap of wetness on the floor. Moreover Sweetie had embellished her language from the grooms at their place in the country—a thing she was forbidden to do. He looked down with a frown at his incorrigible daughter, her curls dangling into her great brown eyes and her flawless body as naked as Eve's. Then he began to laugh, unwillingly, it is true. "Sweetie, you are a little devil," he said. "You'll catch it from nurse by-and-by. All right, come along—we won't wake your mother."

He rummaged in the drawers of a wardrobe and found the flannel coat of a thick suit of pyjamas in which he wrapped the baby as she suggested, and getting into the cold bed, took her carefully into his arms so that the chill of the sheets should not increase the risk of cold.

"What on earth made you get up at this hour, and into mischief already?" he asked lazily, as the child smuggled her tousled head into his great soft beard. Lady Malbrook was right in saying that her husband's family were hirsute.

"Wanted to do things!" said Sweetie in a muffled tone. "It's so stupid to go on sleep—sleep—sleep—when there's a whole world awake outside you!"

" Ah ! " murmured the man comprehensively. " I'm afraid it's safer to sleep sometimes, Sweetie ! What will Nurse do to you this time ? "

But Sweetie declined to pursue an unpleasant subject. " Do you know, it's Mademoiselle's day ? " she asked irrelevantly. " She comes at three this afternoon and goes at five—she looks so glad to go ! "

" I don't doubt it ! "

" And she calls me an *infant terrible*."

" So you are ! I have no doubt that you have increased her respect for the perfidious Albion since her experience of you ! " said Lord Malbrook, yawning. He was beginning to feel warm and pleasantly sleepy again ; but Sweetie tugged him roughly by the beard.

" What's that you said ? *Perfidious Albion* ? "

" It means an incorrigible little English girl, who has no nice French manners. Go to sleep, Sweetie." He guessed that the phrase was being stored up to enrich Sweetie's vocabulary of invective.

" *Perfidious* ! " she murmured to herself, snuggling a little closer in the long-suffering arms that had never refused her refuge. " Daddy, what is Albion, exactly ? "

But Lord Malbrook was asleep, and with a truly philosophical comment that she might as well enjoy a rest before the result of her crimes arrived, Sweetie tucked her toes into his hand to warm them, and slept also, a bundle of flannel coat, floss silk curls, mischief and beauty.

At breakfast, Nurse, with a drawn-down, disapproving under-lip, handed a boiled egg to Viva, and nothing but bread and milk to her younger sister. Then there was a grave consultation in lowered tones with Mother as to whether she should be allowed to go to Riding School, and Lady Malbrook shrugged her shoulders and said, " Oh yes, take her, Nurse. It's better to give her something

to do or learn, and her Master is not a person who lets her have her own way is he? But mind! There is no ride in the Park for her to-day, and Mademoiselle is not to tell her a story this afternoon."

From that moment war entered into Sweetie's heart for the day, and her hand was against every man's. When Viva drew her expressive brows together and said: "You've spoilt everything, Sweetie. We can't go in the Park because of your stupid old bath this morning," she only made a face and retorted, "Don't care! Go by yourself!"

"You'll be able to ride in the road with Mr Durban I daresay," said Nurse consolingly to Viva. "We can ask your Master to arrange it."

"I don't want to, thanks," said the elder child hastily, her face flushing from brow to chin. "It's no fun unless we all go—I'd rather wait till Sweetie hasn't done anything wrong."

She could not explain the horror with which the suggestion filled her, to Nurse. Once or twice by Fate's mischance she had been sent out with the Assistant Master, or he had given her her lesson in the School. On those days the bitterness of a disappointment quite unguessed by her elders made it hard for Viva to keep back the tears and attend to her lesson. There was only the chance, just the chance, that the Riding Master himself would reappear on her tiny horizon before she left the School, to console her.

A child's hero-worship is the most pathetic thing that can cause a smile. It is so wildly improbable, often so devoid of adequate reason, that its reality to the little devotee is almost incomprehensible to older persons. In after years, Lady Viva, between tears and laughter, would look back and wonder what there had been to fill

her childish fancy in the very emphatic and material presence of the Riding Master: but the vividness of his memory was never dulled. She might more naturally have lavished her admiration upon the sweep, or the pianotuner, or the King of England, to whom, by the way, she had been introduced in her seventh year. Any of these had the atmosphere of romance attached to them from living in an unknown world among strange and fascinating surroundings. But the fact remained that all her imagination and devotion had been centred on the Riding Master from the day when he had lifted her into the saddle and told her not to be afraid—more, it must be owned, as a command than a reassurance. Perhaps it was because she was really a solitary child, and easily dismissed as incomprehensible by her little world, that she responded more violently to outside kindness and consideration. Her idol possessed a certain combination of qualities at least that she found lacking both in her own life and Sweetie's; he was always kind, but he was equally firm. There was a sense of reliance about him absolutely healing to the overstrung, overwrought little girl, who found a positive relief and security in doing as he told her.

The Riding Master's name was Lancelot. Lady Viva had heard the stablemen call him "Mr Lance," and Rivers, the assistant in the dressing-rooms, spoke of him as "Mr Lancelot." Since she had discovered this, certain lessons had become as holiday tasks to Viva, and she ransacked the bookshelves for details of Arthur's knight. Tennyson was a joy, if only the governess could be persuaded that ten years was old enough for English poetry, and not interfere with one's rendering of the text. Lady Malbrook had conceded amusedly to Viva's plea that she might read the beautiful, beautiful "Idylls of the King"!

"Oh, let her read them, Miss George—with some exceptions of course," said Lady Malbrook, vaguely reminiscent of somebody called Pelleas who had done something quite objectionable—plaintiff in some action for divorce, wasn't he?—and Tristram and Isolde were of course impossible for children. Everyone knew about them, because they figured in the opera. . . .

"Perhaps Lady Viva had better take the "Idylls" for her practice in reading aloud," said the resigned Miss George.

"Certainly—then you can oversee what she does read," said Viva's relieved mother.

Miss George eliminated Pelleas and Etarre and Tristram and Iseult without trouble: but she had a battle over Guinevere, and was fain to allow her pupil to declaim Lancelot and Elaine, beginning with the knight's approach to the castle of Astolat. Lady Viva had a singularly pure pronunciation for a child, and Miss George was careful to foster it. But she was horrified to find that her pupil seemed suddenly smitten with unruly speech when it came to Sir Lancelot's own utterances. Viva had but just led up to his entrance with a perfectly clear enunciation:

"Then answered Lancelot, the chief of knights,
'Known am I, and of Arthurth hall, and known
What I by mere mithchanth have bwrought, my thield—'"

"Viva!" said the horrified governess. "Don't lisp—read slowly, dear."

The red came up to the child's sensitive face, and her lips set in the fashion with which she rode on horseback. The next few lines were almost inaudible as she bent her head over the page and her long hair fell like a shadow between her and Miss George. "Hold up your head,

dear—don't mumble!" said the longsuffering lady. Viva held up her head—with defiance.

" ' Hereafter you thall know me, and the thield—
I pray you lend me one if thuch you have—
Blank, or at leatht with thome devithe not mine— ' "

Viva in her earnestness over-imitated. The Riding Master's lisp was not so apparent, and indeed it was only when he was not aware that his r's and s's escaped him. But Miss George had not the key to the mystery anyway, and would not have sympathised if she had had it. She thought that Viva was indulging in some silly childish trick to amuse herself and lighten her task, and the colour came to her own face as she quietly closed the book.

" That is enough, Viva. I thought you wanted to read Lord Tennyson's poems. For the future we will go back to the English History for your reading aloud," she said crushingly. " You can run away now—and next time that I tell you not to do a thing, my dear, you must obey me, or I must speak to Lady Malbrook."

The little girl got down from her seat in disgrace, and with a sense of injury and rage in her heart that would have amazed her parents and guardians had they known of it. But they were used to Sweetie's tempers as the typical ones of childhood, and did not count Viva's burning eyes or the blood that came and went too quickly in the small face. On this occasion she walked off without a word, impressed with the brutal injustice and stupidity of grown-up people.

" But if his name was Lancelot *of course* he had a lisp ! " she said fiercely to herself. " They are all silly—they don't know ! "

It is probable that the Riding Master himself knew

nothing of the story of Lancelot and Elaine—he had certainly never read the “Idylls of the King.” He did not correct Lady Viva when she chose to call him by his name, however, because he had given his permission in the first instance.

“I am going to call you Lancelot!” she had said on the third time of seeing him. “It is a beautiful name, and I never could call you anything else. Sweetie needn’t hear—I don’t want her to do it too. I’ll say it quite gently, when no one is listening.”

If he had refused to let her, with those adoring brown eyes upon his face, he would have had a heart of stone. He smiled at her instead and said, “Very well, my lady,” and Viva’s subjection was complete.

Owing to Sweetie’s naughtiness Viva was generally deprived of the joy of riding beside her hero while he gave the lesson, for the uncertainty of what Lady Sacharissa might choose to do made it expedient for the Riding Master to take charge of her himself. Viva rode behind with Durban, divided between a desire to do something outrageous herself in order to claim the Riding Master’s attention, and the loyalty of her effort to do as she was told and please him. On the day of the bath incident the two little girls arrived at the School at noon—their usual hour—and the melancholy news was imparted to the Riding Master that there was to be no going into the Park to-day—Lady Sweetie was confined to barracks as usual.

“That’s a great pity. Now I meant to take you for such a nice ride, and of course I can’t!” said the Riding Master decisively, looking at Lady Sweetie with stern disapproval. She gazed back with frowning defiance, and the hint of fearful curiosity with which he always inspired her. In her heart she felt that had the Riding

Master had authority over her he would on many occasions have slapped her. Now Lady Sweetie had never been slapped, Lord Malbrook being haunted by the remembrance of a younger sister who had been subjected to over-harsh treatment by his mother and her nurses, and whose spirit had been broken long before an attack of croup had seemed the culmination of the tragedy in ending her life. He had a horror of girls being beaten—a fortunate prejudice undoubtedly in Viva's case, and perhaps in Sweetie's also according to the doctor's theory. Putting in the corner, sending to bed, and deprivations of small enjoyments therefore were the only punishments that Sweetie knew : and the methods of which she suspected the Riding Master invested him with the fascination of the Awful Unknown. It did not, however, tend to check her wickedness with regard to him, though perhaps it mitigated it. There was often war between them, and to-day was no exception. Indeed his reproving greeting added fuel to the flame of Sweetie's smouldering wrath.

The two little girls were taught to ride astride, and were dressed like boys in small brown leggings and coats, with caps on their curly heads. They moved with a certain spring and grace that suggested the racehorse, a restlessness that the doctor would have quoted as an instance of his theory, and which Nurse described as "Having wires in their shoes, to look at them." It would have been difficult to imagine anything prettier or more spirited than the two boyish figures, though the fire of life was all with Viva, the strength with Sweetie. As they ran down the steps on to the tan, the latter saw the Assistant Master following them and made a face at him by way of greeting : he shook his head in disapproval, and in turning her face to repeat the offence Lady Sweetie blundered

into the Riding Master, waiting at the foot of the steps with the ponies.

"Stupid old Jones!" she muttered under her breath. But as yet it was only a mutter.

The ponies were by no means the meek, spiritless animals on which little girls are generally supposed to learn to ride. None of the cattle at the School, indeed, was of the rocking-horse order, it being part of the master's system that pupils should learn to manage their horses from the first. He taught people to ride horses, he said; not to sit in the saddle while the horses allowed themselves to be ridden. Lady Viva needed but little assistance in mounting and Lady Sweetie could be equally expert if she pleased; but on this occasion she contrived a small kick at the groom, who bit his lip and tried not to laugh.

"There's going to be ructions between her little ladyship and Mr Lance!" he commented as he retired to the stables.

The prediction was verified in the first fifteen minutes, for it appeared that Sweetie had given herself up to a possession by devils, and was bent on trying her teachers' tempers in every possible way. She was expressly forbidden to stick her heels into her pony to "make him jump," a pastime she rather favoured: but after the third time of this performance the Riding Master caught her reins out of her hands and spoke to her seriously.

"Lady Sweetie, if you do that again I shall take you off the pony's back and decline to give you a lesson to-day!"

"I don't care!" said the child, her pale face suddenly flushing to passion. "I hate lessons! I hate you—ugly old Jones! Stupid old Jones——"

Her voice rose to a shriek of rage, for the Riding Master had dismounted, and throwing his reins to Durban had

caught her out of the saddle. Sweetie clung to the bridle, trying in her madness to pull the pony back on to them both, and behind them the Riding Master heard a cry of fear from Lady Viva.

"Sit still!" he commanded, without turning round. She won't be hurt——" But it was not her sister for whom Lady Viva had cried out. The tussle was short and decisive, for a sturdy seven had no chance against the full male strength of eight and twenty. The Riding Master raised his voice for Blackleigh to come and take the pony back to the stable, and, carrying Lady Sweetie rather as if she were an immaterial parcel, he crossed the School with compressed lips, ran up the steps, and deposited her in the gallery.

"Keep her here, please," he said hastily to the nurses. "I will finish Lady Viva's lesson, but I will not teach such a disobedient little girl as that!"

He pointed to the heap of rage and baffled excitement on the broad couch where Sweetie had flung herself, panting like a little tigress. Her cap had fallen off, and her eyes blazed without tears in her pale face. She looked like an Egyptian fury.

"Ugly old Jones! Beastly old Jones! *Perfidious* Jones!" she shouted, the memory of the morning returning to her just in time for a new and mysterious insult.

"I'm so sorry," said the distracted nurse, apologetic for her charge, but partially helpless before the storm of the moment. "Isn't she dreadful!" she added in a whisper. "We can't stop her calling people by wrong names when she's in a temper. She called our doctor 'Dr Potts' the other day, because she said he looked like it, and of course he is really Sir Francis Parkin!"

The Riding Master's fine lips twitched, but he forbore to smile. "Keep her here, please—don't let her run

down on to the tan," he said, and went back himself to the School, where Viva was still sitting on her pony as he bade her. "All right, Durban I sha'n't want't you. I'll finish the lesson," he said as put his foot in the stirrup and remounted.

Sweetie's misdemeanour had done Viva a good turn for once. She looked up in the fair strong face, a little ruffled from its composure from the late battle, and her own flushed a delicate pink from pleasure. She was on the verge of saying that she was sorry that Sweetie had been so tiresome, but it occurred to her soul, which loved truth for its own crystal sake, that she was *not* sorry. She was particularly glad, because it had eliminated everybody from the universe at the present moment save Lancelot and herself.

"We will try a trot. When I say 'right about turn' remember to do so at once," said the Riding Master briskly. "Now, take up your reins."

Lady Viva did so with worshipping docility. It was difficult however to keep her eyes on the pony when she wanted to look at Lancelot: the Riding Master did not realise this, and was in the habit of saying, "Don't watch me—attend to what you are doing," just as if he were not the most beautiful thing in Lady Viva's world, and it were not breathless joy to gaze at his very square chin and the ripple of his hair above his ears. But the little devotee made a heroic effort, and trotted and right-wheeled her best, for the reward of hearing him say, "Very good indeed—now you may rest. Walk the pony——" for then she might not only look at but talk to him.

"Cousin Ainslie is coming to fetch us to-day," she said, as the Riding Master checked his horse to the pony's paces. "He was telling mother that he wanted to arrange for you to teach a little boy to ride."

"Is it a friend of yours? I hope he is a good little boy!" (He thought of Sweetie, at bay in the gallery!)

"Oh, we don't know him!" Lady Viva's head went up in the air with a strange reflection of some disadvantage connected with this little boy which she had not understood but had imbibed. The Riding Master recognised that Lady Malbrook *had* understood, and the child had unconsciously received the impression. He was rather amused.

"What is his name?" he asked.

"Sydney Errington. It's rather a pretty name!" said Lady Viva critically. "But mother didn't like Cousin Ainslie asking you to teach him at all. Shall you teach him, Lancelot?"

"I don't know. I must hear what your cousin has to say about it first."

"His mother has done something very dreadful," said Lady Viva, with grave candour. "Mother spoke of her as 'That woman!' and father called her a bad lot! But I don't think she'll come here herself, as Cousin Ainslie is arranging about the little boy."

The Riding Master glanced quickly at the little face, lifted in innocent consolation, and cursed the careless talk that put such words into the child's mouth, though she did not understand what she said. Sydney Errington—Mrs Errington! He pieced the connection with the story that had drifted to his ears through various sources.

"There is a gentleman in the gallery now," he said, raising his hat slightly, as much through courtesy to the child at his side as to the stranger. "Is that your cousin?"

"Yes. That's Cousin Ainslie—he is Mr Devereux."

"Devereux!" repeated the Riding Master quickly. "I teach a Mrs Devereux—would the lady be any con-

nection to him ? ” For he remembered Miss Dulcie’s chatter about Mr and Mrs Devereux ; but the gallery was too far off for him to recognise the gentleman he had often seen in the Park.

“ Oh no, I’m sure not,” said Viva, incorrectly certain. “ Cousin Lily never rides—she is too much afraid. And Cousin Ainslie always rides with that Mrs Errington—the boy’s dreadful mother. I’ve seen them in the Row. She doesn’t look at all wicked—she’s a very pretty lady. I wonder what she has done ! ”

“ I wonder much more what your sister is doing ! ” said the Riding Master, lightly turning the subject. “ Do you think she is sorry by this time, or is she telling Mr Devereux that I am an ogre ? ”

“ I expect she’s crying,” said Viva calmly. “ Sweetie generally cries after she gets over her tantrums. Lancelot, may I have one more canter before we finish ? ”

“ Certainly. Pick up your reins—now remember to tighten the left when you force the pony with your heel, and make him start on the right foot. That’s right ! ”

The two riders sprang forward simultaneously it seemed, the Riding Master holding his powerful bay easily with one hand, while he watched keenly for any mistakes in his pupil. Up in the gallery Ainslie Devereux leaned a little over the edge of the “ Royal Box ” to watch them pass, and his face showed pleasure and interest. He loved a good horseman, and the man on the bay beneath him was as much part of his horse as though he had been a Centaur.

On the sofa behind him Lady Sweetie had, as Viva supposed, dissolved into tears. When the passion of the moment was over she generally put out the flame of her anger with weeping, and by the time Ainslie had entered she was lying in a heap, with her hot, tear-stained

face buried in the cushions. She sat up now, wiping the tears from her face with her curls, to the scandal of her nurse.

"For shame, Lady Sweetie! Where is your handkerchief? People don't wipe their faces with their hair!"

"You're wrong there then!" retorted her ladyship with a resentful sob. "For the lady in the Bible did it!"

Nurse was nonplussed. She could not venture to continue the subject for fear of questions as to the back history and origin of the "Lady in the Bible" which would probably follow. Instead, she called the child to her and wiped her eyes, reducing the tangled curls to some sort of order.

"There! Now aren't you sorry you missed your ride through being so naughty?" she suggested. It was not wise to admonish Sweetie too far, and her tone was almost coaxing.

"Y-yes!" acknowledged the culprit, with a forlorn glance at the tan where Viva was swinging round in an enviable canter. She pushed up beside Mr Devereux in the "Royal Box," and looked down with a trembling under lip. "He might have let me go back at the end!" she said.

"What had you been doing? I expect you deserved all you got, and more!" said her cousin suspiciously. He lifted Sweetie to his knee and looked at her flushed face, which the tears had not deprived of its beauty. "I'm glad somebody keeps you in order!" he said.

Lady Sweetie wriggled. "I hate him!" she said vindictively. Then the momentary flash died down again. "He's giving Viva such a *lovely* canter—and it's over time!" she said resentfully.

"Viva does as he tells her. I wonder he doesn't re-

fuse to teach you at all! He will some day and then you'll never learn to ride!"

Sweetie did not like this prospect. There was anxiety in the knit of her brows, and in the earnest brown eyes beneath. "Do you think he will?" she asked breathlessly. "If I say I'm sorry?" This was a great concession, but there were elements of the dramatic in a reconciliation, and Sweetie loved the dramatic. She had violent quarrels with her dolls for the sake of making up afterwards—if, by the way, there were enough of the victim left after the quarrel—and she had once bitten Mademoiselle and then cried and kissed the place with a passionate abandonment utterly inexplicable to that bewildered lady.

"You ought to go down and apologise to him as soon as the lesson is done," said Ainslie very decisively. He had no details of the affair, but he felt sure the apology was warranted.

"I will—I'll go now!" said Sweetie, suddenly scrambling down from his knee and making for the door. Nurse was too late to stop her, but remembering the Riding Master's warning she started in hot pursuit just as Sweetie flew across the School and up to the riders, who, by good luck, were dismounting. The Riding Master turned round sharply from seeing Lady Viva safely off the pony's back to find the younger child tugging at his arm.

"I'm sorry—I really am!" said Sweetie, imperious even in her apology. "I want you to forgive me just this once more time, and make it up!" She flung her arms round the Riding Master's waist and laid her beautiful little face against his breast. "It was Satan—it really *was*!" she pleaded. "He comes in when I'm asleep with my mouth open. Do forgive me!"

"Will you promise to be good next time, and not give me any trouble?" said the Riding Master, not yielding an inch.

But the "next time" reassured Lady Sweetie that at least he was not going to refuse to teach her at once. "I will—really I will! I'll be an archangel!" she said fervently, sounding all the consonants in that abused word. The Riding Master laughed irresistibly, and stooping down kissed the coaxing face while Sweetie hugged him—regardless of Nurse, who had but just arrived, panting.

"I'm sorry she ran after you, but it doesn't matter as the lesson's over, does it?" she said breathlessly. "Mr Devereux wants to speak to you, if you don't mind."

"Yes, I'm just coming," said the Riding Master, gently disentangling himself from Lady Sweetie, who had sat down in a heap on the tan and was clasping one of his long boots as the portion of his anatomy nearest to her. Just at the moment she loved the Riding Master better than anyone in the world, in the stress of her ecstatic emotions. Even when nurse got her on to her feet again, and marched her off to the dressing-room for her overcoat, she turned to kiss her hand to him again with effect. No one had noticed Lady Viva during the whole of this last scene.

The Riding Master gave the horses over to the care of Blackleigh and returned to the gallery, where Mr Devereux was awaiting him. He ran up the steps with a tread more full of impatient vitality than of activity—for he was heavily built and did not tread lightly, and came face to face with the older man as he rose from his seat in the "Royal Box." They both looked at each other a trifle curiously, but for different reasons. Ainslie Devereux's interest was the impersonal one of a horse-

man for another horseman, and also he was a little amused to see the person whose authority had subjected even the notorious Lady Sweetie and reduced her to tears and apologies. There was a strong individuality here, and he felt a sensation of satisfaction as he thought of its influence upon Sydney Errington—what would this simple, singular quality of strength effect for the timid, unnatural boy? For Devereux was clear-sighted enough to judge obvious people correctly, and he comprehended the extreme single-mindedness of the Riding Master as the keynote of his character. There was nothing complex about him. He was strong because he set his mind and will and all his faculties on the doing of the work before him, the routine of his daily life. He was not a gentleman, and it never occurred to him to pretend to be one. He sold horses, and taught people to ride them. Facts were so sufficing to the Riding Master that they prevented his mind being distracted by possibilities. It was this quality that made him successful as a master.

On his side the Riding Master saw the husband of his puzzling pupil, Mrs Devereux, and guessed him the keynote of the tragedy. The man had an interest also as the hero of the ugliest stories afloat about Mrs Errington, which had drifted even into the Riding School: and if report said truly he was at least no coward hero, for he steadily pursued his open attachment to Mrs Errington's chariot wheels and flaunted their intimacy in the face of the public—in the Row, at Hurlingham, in the hunting field, for it had been an equine courtship. The Riding Master did not find Ainslie Devereux's a weak face either: he saw a slight, well-built figure—the right build for the saddle—and a refined, keen face in which there was a touch of temper, but no obvious sensualism. For a

minute the two men looked at each other inclusively, before either spoke.

"Good-afternoon, thir!" said the Riding Master civilly, with the little lisp that Viva loved as one of his own characteristics.

"Oh, good afternoon—you've been teaching my two little cousins, and I've been watching," said Devereux easily. "I told Lady Malbrook I would call for them."

"Yes, thir?"

"I am afraid you have your hands full with that young pickle, Sweetie, as they call her."

"Oh, that's all right, thir!" said the Riding Master, with a little laugh. The lisp seemed to have got into his voice when he laughed, and made it a little thick. "Lady Sweetie gets her own way a good deal, I think, and doesn't understand doing as she is told. She ~~has~~ promised to be more obedient next time."

"By Jove! You must be something wonderful if you have exacted that from her!" said Devereux, with a rather lazy amusement. "I want to know if you can undertake another pupil—a little boy?"

"Yes, thir," said the Riding Master practically. "What age is he?"

"Nine or ten, I think. You don't consider that too young?"

"Oh no!" said the Riding Master, smiling. "I have some pupils as young as five or six. Of course they only learn in the School. What is the name, thir?"

"The child's name? Sydney Errington. He is a very timid boy—very timid, and his mother is most anxious for him to outgrow it. She thinks that riding lessons may give him courage."

"Yes, thir." The tone was quite non-committal.

"Mrs Errington asked me to make all arrangements, as

my little cousins are pupils of yours, and I told her of the School. She will call herself later on, and see the boy have a lesson, unless you think it unwise."

"It would be better not if his mother shares his nervousness," said the Riding Master thoughtfully. "But of course if the lady wishes to come there is no objection."

"Oh, she is not at all nervous, herself. Mrs Errington is a brilliant horsewoman." He hesitated a moment, and some passing annoyance seemed to darken his blue eyes. In his mind's eye he saw the reckless speed of a woman on a black horse, and heard her laugh in memory as she flaunted her power to outride others. "Well, when can the boy begin his lessons?" he said with a slight effort.

The Riding Master opened the engagement-book, and ran his eye down the entries. "Tuesday morning next week, eleven to twelve, or Thursday three to four?" he suggested. "No, I am afraid Thursday is engaged."

He paused, for Devereux had moved up beside him and was looking down at the page. Above the hour he had mentioned was entered "Mrs Devereux. Two to three, or three to four," and he wondered if the husband had seen. If he had he made no sign, unless by a certain deliberation in his voice when he spoke.

"I think Tuesday would be better. Eleven to twelve, you said? Mrs Errington wants the boy to have three lessons a week—can you get them in?"

"Yes, thir. But perhaps I had better fix the next lesson after he has had the first? Then I shall see how he gets on."

"Very well. I believe one always pays in advance." He took out a pocket-book and drew a cheque from the inside, made out already to the Riding School, and signed by his own name. "Mrs Errington asked me to

settle it all," he added carelessly, but now it was the Riding Master's turn to betray no surprise. He merely took out the requisite number of tickets from a locked drawer, stamped them "Riding in School," and put them into an envelope, just as the nurse reappeared with the two little girls in their boyish overcoats. Sweetie, still full of her reconciliation, broke from the woman and precipitated herself upon the Riding Master.

"Good-bye," she said affectionately, clasping his knees in an embarrassing fashion of her own. "I shall be better soon!" With which mysterious assurance she kissed him again, and seized Ainslie by the hand. "We're quite ready," she said breathlessly, "and I want you to take me home in a taxi!"

"Oh, you do, do you!" he said drily, allowing himself however to be dragged out of the gallery and towards the stairs with a brief "Good-morning" to the Riding Master. "And what's to become of nurse and Viva? I can't take you all in a taxi."

"They," said Sweetie largely, "can go in an old four-wheeled thing!"

"Is the carriage coming for you?" Devereux asked Nurse, as they went down the steep stairs to the street, "or were you going to have a cab?"

"We were to have a cab, sir. Her ladyship did not find it convenient to send the carriage."

"Then we'll have two cabs, Nurse, and I'll take this obstreperous young person with me. I am sure you will be thankful to have her off your hands for a time! Sweetie, be quiet, and leave the men to call the cabs! If you make a noise I won't take you!" For Sweetie's spirits had returned, and she was waving her arms like a small windmill and calling "Taxi!" in a shrill sweet treble. Devereux shook her slightly, as he turned round

to look after the rest of his charges. "Here you are, Nurse. Viva! Where's Viva?"

For the minute she had disappeared, but not far. As the Riding Master closed the engagement-book and turned from the table where it lay, he heard a rush of light returning feet and his elder pupil bounded into the gallery again and stood an instant as if half afraid, half hesitating, in a lovely attitude of unconscious vitality. She put the Riding Master in mind of a fawn, with her forward spring and her great lambent brown eyes, though he was not given to such fancies.

"Well, what is it? Left anything behind?" he said, very naturally.

Lady Viva drew one foot after the other in a restrained desire to reach his side. Then, suddenly, she flew to him, and lifted imploring arms to the broad shoulders out of her reach.

"Oh, Lancelot, kiss me too!—me too!" she sobbed bitterly.

He could not gauge the depth of emotion in the quivering face, or the shaken voice: but it did reach his brain that the child was jealous—an unlikely thing to expect from the slight relations between them, but obviously the only explanation. He sat down on the couch where Sweetie had thrown herself earlier in the morning, and drew Viva between his knees.

"What's the matter?" he said again. "Is it because your little sister——"

"You like her best!—everyone likes Sweetie best!" said the child, with a quick wounded look from her beautiful eyes. Sweetie was her father's favourite, and even her mother—whom Viva adored—favoured the naughty but more comprehensible child. In Viva's experience the indulgences of life always went to Sweetie, but it

had not been intolerable until now. She had wanted to kill Sweetie when that young person held out her demonstrative olive-branch, and then the hunger in her had merely pleaded that she could not be quite ousted with her hero by her all-conquering sister. "Me too!" said the lovely, unbalanced nature. "Love me too!"

"No, I don't like Sweetie best—you try to help me by doing as I tell you, and Sweetie doesn't," said the Riding Master, pointing the plain moral of obedience in his reply. "But I couldn't refuse to make it up with her, could I?"

The child gave him a strange, searching look, the brown eyes seeming as if they would pierce the grey ones; but she found nothing there save honest misunderstanding. If he had not been Lancelot he would have seemed to her stupid: but as she could not decry him she only laid her flowerlike face against his and clasped her small hands round his thick strong neck—he was rather the bull-dog type of Englishman, was the Riding Master.

"You couldn't help it if you did, and you are always so beautiful!" she said with devout belief, and a generosity that was god-like. "I do love you, Lancelot—heaps more than I can tell you. It's all here, hurting me!" she added, laying her hand on her slight breast.

The Riding Master laughed again, perhaps a little embarrassed. He was touched too, and laid the soft head against his shoulder for an instant while he fondled the child and told her that she must go back to her friends, they would be waiting for her. But when he released her and she ran out of the gallery again he looked down and saw that a button of his favourite waistcoat had caught a big, bright tear.

"Poor little soul!" he said, with vague discomfort somewhere in his kindly, unemotional manhood. "I

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expect she gets left in the background by the other child—who is a little tartar ! ” He thought of Sweetie, shaking her fists at him and calling him names, and he laughed shortly. Durban entered the gallery a minute later and informed him that the Beaumans were gone. Work was over until after lunch, for there were no more lessons until three.

“ Who was that fair chap who came for them, Mr Lance ? ” he said curiously.

“ That’s Mr Devereux,” said the Riding Master significantly, and Durban whistled.

“ Does he know that *she* comes here ? ”

“ I think not—but he saw the engagement-book ! ”

“ What did he come for ? ”

“ To arrange for Mrs Errington’s son to have lessons. He gave me the cheque—signed by himself ! ”

“ Well, they’re a pretty queer lot ! ” said Durban drily. “ I admire Devereux’s taste anyhow—Mrs Errington’s twice the woman his own wife is, if she is a hot ‘un ! ”

“ Mrs Devereux is handsome too,” said the Riding Master quietly, shutting his firm lips after the remark.

But Durban shrugged his shoulders. “ She may be—but it’s no more use to her than if she were a lay figure, for she doesn’t know how to make the most of the advantage,” he said.

Out of the mouths of the Riding School came perfect wisdom.

CHAPTER V

" There lived a lady—I tell you true—
Comely she was, and young, and gay,
And her will was ever her own wild way—
O I tell you true !
She loved her horse and her hound and her hawk,
And better by far to gallop than walk,
And O, the hills are blue ! "

HAD the Riding Master been guilty of the weakness of curiosity there might have been some cause for it on the morning when Sydney Errington was booked to take his lesson. For, taking it all round, the Riding School had heard a good deal about the Errington scandal, the broken links of such stories drifting in through various sources. First there was Miss Dulcie, with her retarded love affair, for Sir Digby's attendance at the end of her lessons met with mute sympathy both from the groom people—whom he tipped—and the masters—to whom he was always cheerily civil. Then the chatter of the Malbrook children supplied more information than their elders at all conceived, and their connection with Mr Devereux had led to his first appearance at the School. Indirectly, too, Mrs Errington had been the means of sending Devereux's wife there, though this was only a surmise in the minds of the Master and Durban. Finally there might, or there might not, have been a mental note in the Riding Master's book of memory of a woman riding a thoroughbred black horse in the Park one morning, for Jewel was an inevitably noticeable figure. It was part of his business to observe riders, but it may have been just as much part of it to forget them to judge from the manner that never com-

mitted him and the face that could keep secrets—his own included.

The Riding Master was only just returned from Battersea with a pupil—an American youth whose opinion of himself was better than his seat—when the child who had caused all the trouble to Miss Dulcie and her world arrived in charge of his nurse. Perhaps it flashed through the master's brain that had he never existed it would have straightened the tangle in various people's existences, and his mother would never have flashed like a meteor into the well-ordered sphere of the London universe. He did not look to have a very strong hold upon life either, as he stood clinging to his dark-skinned nurse and looking with hunted eyes at the unfamiliar gallery, and the emphatic figure of the Master. There was nothing prepossessing about Sydney Errington, but had he been a girl he might have appealed to stronger people through his very delicacy. He seemed a fair, slender child, with a face positively sickly with fear, and a watery appearance about his eyes that suggested that tears were not far distant. The woman *Transito* did not speak, which added to the oddity of the scene, but handed the Riding Master a note in which Mrs Errington briefly stated that her little boy would take his lesson at the time appointed, and that she herself would come to the School towards the close of the lesson if she could manage it, to see how he got on. It seemed to the Riding Master a good plan, for he liked to have his pupils in his own hands from the first, and had noticed that the presence of parents and guardians rather upset a nervous child than otherwise.

"Well," he said cheerfully, putting his strong hand on the boy's shrinking shoulder. "So you've come to learn to ride? You needn't be afraid—I am going to take great care of you!"

Sydney looked up at the unyielding face with a kind of despair that was quite beyond the Master's comprehension. He saw, with a horrible intuition, the clean lips and fearless eyes, and the strong set chin, and instead of giving him confidence these things added to his fright. Here was a man who would force him to do the thing he dreaded worse than a nightmare ; there was no use in appealing to those characteristics, which were just those he lacked himself, from a standpoint of fear. His lip quivered, and he gave a silent look round him like a trapped animal in search of escape.

" We'll leave your nurse here to look on, and we'll go down into the School," said the Riding Master, " Are you ready ? "

Then the boy spoke for the first time, with a passion of terror that surprised the Riding Master, prepared for reluctance though he had been. " Oh no ! no ! " said Sydney, and flung himself against *Transito*, clinging to her waist with weak, agonised arms.

The woman bent over him, speaking rapidly in Spanish, and soothing him. But Mrs Errington's note had given the Riding Master both orders and authority. " The little boy is over-nervous," she had written simply, " and must get over it. Please take no notice if he says he cannot ride at first. He will recover very quickly when he finds that he must." The child's terror suggested self-indulgence and too great giving way to fanciful fears, and the request that he should be taught in spite of them was imperative. The Riding Master took a step nearer and quietly unlocked the frenzied little hands.

" Come, you mustn't be a coward," he said not unkindly. " I have told you that you won't be hurt. Come down and look at the pony. All right, nurse," he added, with an offhand nod to the woman, who seemed

half inclined to uphold the boy in his resistance. Before she could do so the Riding Master had lifted him in his arms like a baby, and ran downstairs and into the School to give him less time to speak. The pony had been already brought in from the stables, and the groom was holding it. The Riding Master lifted Sydney into the saddle and released himself from the clutch which had been transferred to him from the nurse, in spite of the nervous tremor which shook the poor little light body, and the tears that were really beginning to flow. He expected a roar once the boy found himself on the animal's back, and kept a grip of his arm to retain him there ; but to his surprise Sydney only went very white, with a curious bluish look round the lips, and the working features were all that told of his ecstasy of fear.

" I'm—I'm falling ! " he said, his voice dying to a whisper, and swaying a little in the saddle. He spoke English with the same soft accent that the Riding Master was to notice later in his mother.

" Oh no, you're not—get your breath a little, and sit still. Feel better now ? " He was afraid the boy might faint, which would have forced him to give him a respite, though he fully meant to continue the lesson as soon as he recovered. The Riding Master did not approve of nervous little boys, and, as the child himself had divined, there was no use in appealing to his inflexibility.

But Sydney did not faint ; he seemed almost hypnotised between his own terror and the Riding Master's strength of will. He sat upright in the saddle, holding the reins with nerveless fingers, and his face with the silent tears running down it turned to the Riding Master. It was no use to tell him to look at the pony ; that he simply could not do, and for the present the master found it better to let the child watch and obey him. After

a few minutes he led the pony slowly over the tan, holding the child firmly, but just when he thought they were getting over the first symptoms of fear, and Sydney might sit alone, came another agonised whisper :

“ Please let me get off ! ”

The Riding Master pretended not to hear. “ Sit up more, my boy, and try to grip the saddle with your knees,” he said briskly. “ Now take you reins in both hands—keep your heels down. Come, that’s better ! ” For the child with trained obedience had tried to do as he was told at each injunction, and that the nervous jerk of his limbs was not either sitting straight or holding tight, was obviously not his fault. To help him to feel at ease and get his balance the Riding Master stopped the pony and forced the boy back in the saddle until he lay flat, his shoulders resting on the animal’s hind quarters.

“ Lie still ! ” he commanded. “ There, you see, you can’t fall. That’s better, isn’t it ? Now raise yourself.”

Sydney did so with a suppressed shriek, and caught at the Master’s shoulder in preference to the reins. He was as disheartening a pupil as the Master had ever attempted to teach.

“ What makes you so frightened ? Pat your pony’s neck and see how gentle he is ! ” he said gravely, with a really puzzled look in his alert grey eyes. “ You know boys mustn’t let themselves be afraid. I teach a little girl who is younger than you, and she is not afraid of anything. She can trot and canter.” He might have added that if Lady Sweetie, who incongruously pointed an object lesson, had been more afraid, it would have been an advantage to master and pupil alike.

Sydney turned his face pitifully, and looked at his torturer with sad eyes from which the tears seemed to

have washed the colour. "I don't like horses—they squeal and jump!" he said pleadingly.

"Oh, that's only the Argentine ponies you have seen—English horses are much better mannered," said the Riding Master, laughing. "Come, we must go on again. There's your mother up there in the gallery, come to watch how you get on."

He had seen, with the briefest glance and lift of his hat, that the seat next to the dark-skinned nurse was occupied by a lady who was leaning her elbow on the velvet edge of the "Royal Box" and her chin in her hand, as if she watched the scene below. He had hardly reaxed his watch upon his pupil to meet Mrs Errington's unfathomable eyes, and had certainly not turned to her again. But Sydney had not noticed her entrance at all, and the information of her presence had a curious effect upon him. He took his hand from the Master's shoulder and clutched the reins in a stiff, awkward fashion, sitting erect and keeping his balance alone for the first time, though the panting breaths still tore their way from his heart to his white lips. Taking advantage of his new effort the Riding Master led the pony himself round the School, and then holding the animal with one hand and Sydney with the other made the pony trot and himself ran by the side. Several times he thought the child would slip from the saddle, and once he had to answer that breathless cry of "I'm falling!" with a reassuring "No, you're quite safe"; but those wonderful eyes watching him from the gallery seemed to exert a spell, and from the time of Mrs Errington's appearance the lesson went better.

At the end of half-an-hour the Riding Master lifted the child from the saddle saying, "That's enough for to-day," and set him on the tan. Sydney swayed a little

as if he were going to fall, and stumbled when he tried to cross the School to the stairs ; but he would not look at the pony, or pat it, or feed it with the sugar the groom offered him.

" I'm afraid of it ! " he said quite simply, and the Riding Master's laugh was a little contemptuous. It seemed an extraordinary irony of fate that the admittedly cowardly child should be a son of the fearless figure he had seen on a dangerous horse—for the Riding Master recognised the qualities of Mrs Errington's mount—in the Row !

He followed his pupil up the stairs to the gallery and found that the boy had gone straight to his nurse and was sitting in her lap, white and inert, his head lying back against her shoulder. Mrs Errington had risen and was speaking to the woman rapidly in Spanish. She turned to the Riding Master as he appeared, and her voice dropped into English with great slowness and sweetness.

" Thank you for the trouble you have taken. You have great patience, and I fear a pupil who needs it."

" He is nervous, but he will get over that," said the Riding Master confidently. He glanced at the child with some concern however, for it seemed as if, once the necessity for effort were over, his body had collapsed from the strain of his will. " Would he like some water ? A first lesson is rather an ordeal," he said.

" Oh no, he is only tired. He never does anything ! " she said, with a faint impatience in her tone. " His nurse can take him home now."

" And he will ride to-morrow ? It would be better I think—the sooner he gets used to it the sooner he will get over his nervousness."

" Just as you think best. You hear, Sydney ? You will ride again to-morrow."

The boy turned his heavy head, and looked at them both blankly. "Must I, mamma?" he said breathlessly.

"Of course you must—if your master says so. You are to obey him as you do me. Don't be a muff, Sydney. You must learn to do things like other boys!"

Sydney did not answer, save by hiding his face on his nurse's breast. The woman entered no protest in his favour, and it seemed to the Riding Master that her protecting attitude was less affection for the child than a practical sense of his necessity. She lifted him quite indifferently in her arms, and with a brief question to her mistress carried him out of the gallery and down the stairs as soon as the grooms had called a cab. Mrs Errington lingered behind, asking questions about the School and the hours of teaching, while her curious detached gaze wandered from the Riding Master to the gallery and seemed in some strange way to have nothing to do with the subject in hand. She had unfastened the long graceful veil she had worn on her entrance, and held it in her hand as she talked. The morning light fell full on her colourless skin and found it flawless, bringing out also the smouldering red lights in the hollows of her dusky hair. All the brown shade had gone from her eyes to-day and left them nothing but changing grey and green, as dark as seaweed in a rock pool. Those who hated her said that at such times she was most dangerous.

"I think I should like to take a few lessons myself," she said unexpectedly. The Riding Master was not often taken by surprise, but with a remembrance of her appearance the other day he very nearly lisped.

"But you ride already, madam—I think I have seen you in the Park!"

She turned her face from its half-insolent survey of the

School to his, and her eyes lightened with a sudden mockery.

"I do not ride like any other Englishwoman—so my friends assure me!" she said. "I should like at least to find out what it is I do that is so unconventional."

"Oh, certainly, madam—if you like?" He looked directly at her, as was his custom, and saw the red lips curve a little and open at him.

"But you must teach me yourself."

"Certainly, madam—if you prefer it!"

Mrs Errington turned from him abruptly and crossed the gallery in her most inconsequent fashion. "Are these the dressing-rooms?" she asked, her hand on the door of the nearest room. "May I put my veil on in there?"

"Certainly, madam!" he said again, and opened the door for her, standing aside for her to pass in. Then, in passing, she looked up again and suddenly laughed. Her eyes had the unconcealed delight of a child promised some coveted treat, and the audacious red of her lips suggested an unbestowed kiss. She passed without a pause into the dressing-room beyond, and the Riding Master closed the door after her with a decided click.

As he turned back towards the gallery, he came face to face with his next pupil, Mrs Ainslie Devereux.

"I am sorry to be late!" she said, with her usual stiffness and restraint of manner. It seemed more marked in contrast to the other woman who had just passed into the dressing-room.

"Only five minutes, madam—the horse will be all ready for you." He was going to call the groom, but seeing her turn to the dressing-rooms he stopped her. "There is a lady gone in there to tie her veil—she will not be a moment."

"I can wait," said Mrs Ainslie Devereux.

"Call a cab for Mrs Errington," said the Riding Master to Durban, who had just appeared. "And tell them to bring Patience for Mrs Devereux."

Mrs Errington! The woman who had good cause to know that ill-omened name stopped short, and looked back at the two men. Durban ran downstairs again to have the cab called, and the Riding Master had sat down at the table to enter Sydney Errington's next lesson in the engagement-book. He had his back to Mrs Devereux. When he next looked round she was gone.

She had only paused for a second, and then it seemed as if the impulse in her body and the wild suggestion in her brain were one. She wanted to see this woman face to face whose mere presence was a madness in men's blood, and who played with them for a season and then threw them by as broken toys. The very wantonness of her rumoured wickedness had a lurid fascination for Lily Devereux in her stiff purity. Men never talked to her save out of pity, and never looked at her save with disappointment. She wanted for once to see and feel the spell, if there were one, of the witchery of womanhood.

She opened the door quietly and went into the room, her entrance remaining unchallenged by the occupant already there, who probably thought it was only Rivers on some business connected with the School. Mrs Devereux closed the door behind her with the same leisurely caution, as if to make sure of her own project. For a moment indeed she almost thought of turning the key and keeping possession of it. Then she stood still a minute to arrange her thoughts and to brace her nerves if so be they needed it, though she knew that her intention had never faltered; and while she did so she looked about her collectedly, and noticed, for the first time, the details

of the dressing-table—two yellow-glass dishes for hairpins, a Japanese tray of pins, a brass powder box, and smelling salts. *Smelling salts!* It gave her a kind of shock. Did pupils sometimes faint? Was her own heart going to betray her? She had a hysterical desire to shriek with laughter at the thought that she might herself turn them to account.

Mrs Errington had her back to the silent intruder, who stood by the door so stolidly as to suggest something unusual even without speech; she twisted a loose strand of her smouldering hair behind her ear, and took up the handglass and surveyed herself. There was still a curious lift to the corners of her mouth as she did so, a babyish smile that was almost naive, quite roguish. As she put the glass down she caught sight of Mrs Devereux's figure explaining the sound of the opening door, and turned to acknowledge her presence with a first dawn of surprise.

"I am afraid I am in your way. I am just going," she said carelessly.

"Mrs Errington!" said the other in a perfectly collected voice.

Mrs Errington put down the handglass and turned to face the speaker deliberately. She looked full at Mrs Devereux for a moment, and there was a gradual recognition in her eyes. For of necessity she had had Lily Devereux pointed out to her by her acquaintance in the moving panorama of the London season, with intention, if not actual reference to the husband who dangled between them.

"I wanted to speak to you," said Mrs Devereux, with a directness that brought the situation to a point and disposed of all preliminaries. "I took this opportunity, knowing that you were in the dressing-room."

Jewel's eyes narrowed themselves to a half of their beauty, and lost their habitual detachment from earthly things. She saw the other woman, from her solid glossy hair to the tips of her riding boots. The day was very warm, and Mrs Devereux was wearing no hat. Her face, with all its unemotional contours, was straitly revealed in the light from the large bow window that walled one side of the dressing-room.

"Is it not rather—unnecessary?" said Mrs Errington indifferently.

But Lily Devereux was not to be denied. For a moment her eyes roamed round the confined space as if seeking inspiration there rather than from the vivid personality immediately in her path. For ever after the little strip of dressing-room was a theatre to her mind, the background of a kind of drama, so that she always associated certain words and phrases of her rival with a narrow room and a bay window in the deep seat of which two espedesdras stood in blue and gold pots. Mrs Errington's words were absorbed for ever in her brain; in a secondary sense it seemed that she had received an equally indelible impression of small squares of glass of an ugly pink and yellow shade, because these were framed in sham Queen Anne style above the casement windows. And the terra-cotta of the walls, the wardrobe with the long glass, the picture of a lady riding astride in one of Thomas' habits—even the Oriental rug and gas stove—were always the frame to her own and Mrs Errington's figures, while they spoke bitter truths of life.

"You have taken my husband from me," she said in the same curiously composed tone. "I acknowledge your power. I am not making an appeal to you to get him back. But I want to know what your spell is—how you did it."

Mrs Errington's narrowed eyes suddenly widened. A look that was not so much surprise as interest dawned in her face under the shadow of the sweeping hat and veil. The situation was beginning to appeal to her—it was so unexpected as to be bizarre, grotesque—and it excited her imagination.

“ You are a woman also ! ” she said significantly.

“ Mere flesh and blood—that is nothing,” said Mrs Devereux, with a fierce contempt for her own figure, reflected in the glass beyond Jewel's. You know that as well as I—far better. I have no power to attract—my husband or other men, it is all one.”

Mrs Errington leaned a little forward on the last words, her hand outstretched, a raised figure pointing as if to the crux of the sentence.

“ ‘ Or other men ’—did you ever try ? ”

There was a pause while Lily Devereux looked back comprehensively. “ No ! ” she said with deliberation.

“ Look in the glass,” said Mrs Errington, with a certain scorn that haunted her voice. “ You are a handsome woman—twice as good-looking as half the others who outshine you every day. But your face is asleep. You are always thinking of one man—who is quite secure in the knowledge—and don't see the others. So they don't see you.”

“ I don't want them to,” said Mrs Devereux, with the pride stung by that gibe of her husband's long since “ I would extend a like charity to you.”

“ Exactly. He knows that ! ”

“ It would only make him angry—in me ! ” said the wife slowly. She looked with eyes that had grown wistful at the woman who was not the wife, and the new expression altered the monotonous lines of her face at once.

"Make him angry!" said Jewel Errington, with a blaze of light in her eyes that never came from heaven. Those sombre fires were lit from another place long since, as much as the smouldering colour in her hair, and both burned mankind whose passions were responsible for their lighting. "Make him angry—and enjoy yourself meanwhile. There are other men in the world besides one's husband. You have never tried. Listen!"—she spoke with a sudden quickening of her breath and blood, so that it seemed as if her vitality tingled in the air and flashed a passing warmth on Mrs Devereux's impassiveness. "I was a neglected wife once. I broke my heart for it as you can't even understand. . . ." Her voice shook with a passion that rarely stirred it, and had Lily Devereux but known she was face to face with a side of Jewel Errington's temperament that might never be revealed again, and that had never been revealed to any of the men who boasted the greatest intimacy with her. "You are like plaster-of-Paris saints, you Englishwomen. Marble might come to life—not the imitation!" The panting breath died down, and she spoke in a lower and more dangerous tone. "When it was all over, and I was dead as far as feeling went, I remembered that there were other men, and that passion doesn't hurt you like love. Only—don't lose the end in the means as I did."

Mrs Devereux looked as if the storm of words had dazed her. There was a flush on her face reflected from the other's heat and fury—something like a growing curiosity in her eyes too.

"I took other men, and they amused me," said Mrs Errington with that same ominous quiet. She turned to the door as if this were the natural end of the situation. "I forgot my original intention in making fools of them—

the fooling was so sweet in itself. Stop there—you are not built for it. But you can have your husband back. He begins to bore me—and there are other men ! ”

The soft insolence of the words had melted into the eager, roguish smile before the door opened and she had gone. Mrs Devereux stood still, exactly where she was, and looked across the room at herself in the glass. The unusual colour in her face struck her as uncomfortable before she saw that it was becoming. She put up her hands to her tightly bound hair and pulled it a little, loosening the severity of it. Then suddenly she walked up to the dressing-table and took up the smelling-salts, for the amazing reality of what she and Mrs Errington had done began to shock her, just as people used to clothes are shocked when they see nakedness. It seemed to her an appalling thing that she should have gone to school to her husband's mistress. The lesson taught her had not yet had time to assert its reception in her mind—it was the learning that appeared outrageous.

Five minutes later the Riding Master was apologising to Mrs Devereux for having kept her waiting all this time. He had been called to the telephone, and then detained by a customer, and had thought that Durban was taking the lesson. Mrs Devereux discountenanced his apologies. She did not mind—the day was almost too hot for riding, and she was glad to put off her lesson. She smiled a little uncertainly as she spoke, and there was an unusual flush on her face to bear out her tribute to the heat. The Riding Master thought that she was looking very well, and being a conscientious young man he made no allowance for the languor he had suggested. He gave her full time and something over, discarding the idea of his own luncheon, and keeping Mrs Devereux to her task,

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albeit she was a little uncertain in her attention, and more silent than ever.

"I am afraid I am a very disheartening pupil—but you are an excellent teacher. You never seem to lose patience!" she said, as he dismounted her at last.

"There is only one way to teach a pupil," said the Riding Master, with the simplest conviction. "And that is to go on until they do you credit. We don't take them in the Park until they do," he added frankly. "Never stand near a horse's hind-quarters, madam—keep the rein in your hand and run it up to the bit—so!" He slipped it deftly along so that the pupil was in complete command of the animal as she stood beside him, even had he attempted to go on. The Riding Master found something to teach even when a lesson was over, or before it began.

Mrs Devereux went home in solitary fashion as usual, in a taxi-cab. The Riding Master himself put her into it, and advised her to have the windows up as she was hot. But though that unusual flush on her face deepened a little she shook her head. The confinement of any small space seemed to her intolerable just now. Her thoughts were as birds let out from a cage; they must have room to fly and feel their unused wings.

And, after the long day's work was over, the Riding Master also went home, and lay awake till the small hours, thinking, not of Mrs Devereux, but of Sydney Errington, and pondering and questioning the failure of his methods to make this pupil something that he apparently could not be. He never lost nerve or temper, and he never gave up hope; but the boy was a puzzle. The same iron patience that trained the horses, however, trained the pupils, and if one form of lesson failed another must be found. As the clocks struck three the Riding

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Master turned again upon his pillows, grasping the problem as he did his horses.

“By Jove!” he said. “I’ve got it. He’s afraid to fall.” And, wearied, he laid his head down and slept deeply.

CHAPTER VI

"As I ride, as I ride,
Could I break what Fate has tied,
Ere I pried, she should hide,
(As I ride, as I ride)
All that's meant me—satisfied."

ROBERT BROWNING.

LADY MALBROOK gave a party. She sent out a few hundred invitations to people who didn't matter—save for her husband's hereditary politics—and she asked her own set to dine first and support her.

"It will be as bad as a Speaker's dinner to the Opposition," she moaned. "But the rooms get so crowded that you can't see half the people you don't like. Conservatives always get into bunches, unless they are stranded on the staircase."

So she ordered the carriage and went out canvassing on her own account, having further cautioned nurse that the Lady Saccharissa Beauman was to be put to bed at half-past seven on the night in question, and kept there—experience having taught that when Sweetie scented meringues she was apt to put in a startling appearance in the drawing-room whatever the hour.

Miss Dulcie and her brother were not of the dinner-party, but were urged to be early if they wanted to secure any of the cosy corners out of the way of the throng. Major Edward Vane-Hurst was only Miss Dulcie's half-brother, by the way, and a long stretch of fifteen years lay between them, but as a reminder of the fact rendered the little lady infuriate her friends usually preserved a

respectful silence, and accepted the relationship as if it were the full blood-tie. Major "Teddy" stood six feet two in his stockings, and rode fourteen stone to the regret of his polo ponies, for he played polo, and played it well, if a little too hard, and only Messrs Withers and the Brothers Miller knew how he managed to be so mounted as to outpace lighter weights. He was a big man in most ways, with an enormous tenderness for women and children ; but his own sex were apt to get buffeted when they came in contact with his solidity, whether physically or mentally, and they resented it. He was always chosen to play Number One in a polo team, and he was probably the only man who ever enjoyed the position. Aggressive tactics were his forte, and he was quite as keen on harrying the captain of the opposing players as on getting the ball and scoring himself ; but woe betide his own Number Two if he did not play with strict justice and give Major Teddy his fair chance ! He was a terror when he rode off another player on the polo ground ; he had a mental way of riding-off opponents in argument that was hardly less disconcerting.

Miss Dulcie adored her half-brother. She had long since discovered that he could be coerced to nothing, and coaxed to everything, and she had applied the knowledge from her first short frocks. "Teddy is like a horse with a hard mouth," she said once in confidence to Sir Digby. "If you pull at him it gets dead, and then you may just as well give it up and go home. But I never allow him to get a dead mouth. Half the time he doesn't know I've not the reins."

Major Teddy hated parties, and said so with brutal frankness to Lady Malbrook, and Lady Malbrook was in despair because she knew that if she could persuade him

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to come there was no one on whom she could so well depend to feed the dowagers and seek out the most uninteresting wallflowers. His kindness of heart always made him the victim of the dowdy. But Miss Dulcie wanted to go to the party because Lady Malbrook had asked Sir Digby, and Teddy was a much more lenient chaperon than her father. Therefore Lady Malbrook had an invincible ally, and Major Teddy refused a bachelor dinner and a really excellent foursome at bridge, and followed Miss Dulcie up the staircase at Malbrook House before the crush began, with just the air that you may see in a large St Bernard dog following a small child who plays at being in charge.

Mrs Ainslie Devereux had been one of the dinner-party, and had sat on Lord Malbrook's left hand, too far off for her hostess to mark her spasmodic efforts at conversation. Lord Malbrook did not appreciate them. "Lily looks at her best to-night," he thought with quiet approval, for she was his wife's cousin. "When a woman is really as good-looking as that she can afford to be a bit dull. One can always look at her. But I wish she would leave me to eat my dinner in peace, and keep her tongue for dessert. These cutlets are damned good! I hope Firefly won't quarrel with the cook." (Firefly was his name for his wife, and trespassers on the privilege were strictly prosecuted.)

Mrs Devereux had some doubts of her own appearance that night and it had added to her social difficulties. She had had her hair dressed differently, and had tried in a shy fashion to lessen the repellent dignity of her appearance. Something in her maid's eye had suggested to her that the woman thought her mad or ludicrous. The latter was the worse to bear. The thought had brought the colour to her face, and the knowledge of

her own motive had troubled her eyes. She looked at herself shrinkingly in the glass, and the unfamiliar aspect made her almost miserable—but she would not alter it again to the old fashion. There was a grave determination about Lily Devereux that made it impossible for her to turn back once she put her hand to the plough. Besides, there really was not time. She drove to Malbrook House with her heart startled out of its regularity by her own outrageousness in having a purpose that she would hardly acknowledge, and the first-fruits of her effort were that Lord Malbrook consigned her to the ranks of beautiful dummies.

The dinner-party drifted into the reception-rooms as soon as the function was over, and almost the first thing on which Mrs Devereux's eyes lighted was a fair smooth head and broad shoulders coming up the staircase behind Miss Dulcie. Teddy Vane-Hurst was clean-shaven and wore an eyeglass. He looked as much like a barrister as a soldier, and his keen close eyes were really near-sighted, but as strong as near-sighted people's always are. Miss Dulcie stopped to chatter and laugh with Lady Malbrook, and her escort had to wait his turn. Mrs Devereux looked past the girl and spoke to her cousin.

"Here is Major Vane-Hurst," she said a little obviously.

"Oh yes—how are you, Teddy? How good of you to be so early! My husband's somewhere about——" Lady Malbrook returned to her chatter with Miss Dulcie with the comfortable remembrance that Teddy would take Lily Devereux off her hands now—he was so good-natured that even Lily's heaviness was not too much for him.

"Where were you all this afternoon, Mrs Devereux?" said Major Teddy, and he shook hands with Lily as if he liked her. She was a tall woman, but his manner was just as kindly protecting as if she had been five feet

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nothing, and of the clinging, appealing type. "I expected to see you at Ranelagh."

"I never go to Ranelagh—or hardly ever," said Lily Devereux in her direct fashion, and the flush left her face for a moment and made her as unusually white as she had been pink. A vision of the terrace was before her mentally, and herself and her mother-in-law approaching the little tables set for tea. As they arrived another couple were departing, and the two women passed Ainslie Devereux and Mrs Errington without recognition on either side. Lily had said nothing. It was one of the few occasions on which she had chanced on her husband in attendance on the notorious widow, and she regarded it as a grave insult. The elder Mrs Devereux had shrugged her thin shoulders and belied the painful lines about her lips with a heroic smile.

"It was very unfortunate—more so for him than for us, my dear," she said in extenuation. "He will feel the discomfort even though he never refers to it. . . ."

She spoke as a mother to whom her son's mind is still an intimate thing. Perhaps she found some comfort in her knowledge of him, as greater than his unresponsive wife's. Lily had not commented; but she had avoided Ranelagh and Hurlingham since as if they were plague-stricken, nor did it occur to her to veil her avoidance in excuses. "I never go to Ranelagh—or hardly ever," she said to Major Vane-Hurst.

"It was a rippin' match," he said, screwing the glass yet more firmly into his eye as he peered about for a comfortable seat. "We played the Second Life and beat 'em by three goals to one. It was a fast game. One of our ponies got clear over the boards (it was the Old Ground) and scattered half-a-dozen people! It wasn't the man's fault—the brute jumped wide."

Mrs Devereux looked at him deliberately as he held aside a curtain for her, and disclosed two comfortable low seats in an alcove. No other man would have risked a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs Devereux from which no reasonable excuse could have rescued him. He would have regarded the prospect of boredom with dismay. "I would have gone if I had known that you were playing!" she said suddenly.

"You must come next time—I'll send you passes if you are not a member," he responded kindly. He had not the least idea of her having just made an advance that she had never made before to any man. It turned her a little giddy mentally, and she wondered at her own lack of taste, while to Vane-Hurst it was merely a very usual civility. But Lily Devereux had no intention of recanting once she had started on the strange path pointed out to her. She merely seized on Major Vane-Hurst as the man nearest to her, and one whom she knew a little better than most through his own charity. He represented nothing to her but a man—one of those other men beside her husband to whom she was passionately desirous of proving attractive, if only to reinstate her fallen self-respect. She had made her first effort at dinner on Lord Malbrook, and failed; but she hardly recognised her failure in the novelty of the effort.

"I don't know much about polo," she said, still looking at her companion with large eyes that had an unusual excitement in them. "I am so ignorant of the game itself."

"Most women are, until some fellow has explained it to them," he rejoined. "Dulcie—my sister—knew nothing until I took her down to Hurlingham and sat with her and told her what was going on, detail by detail. Now she's awfully keen, and fancies herself and her

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knowledge no end ! ” He gave a tender little laugh as at a dearly beloved child.

“ I wish you would explain the game to me one day—some afternoon when you are not playing. It would make the matches so much more interesting,” said Mrs Devereux, and she marvelled at herself even while she spoke.

“ I will, with pleasure.” It was quite natural to Teddy to do something for women, he felt in his element the instant they made demands on him. “ Look here, this is Thursday—there’s a match on Saturday between the club and the White Rabbits. It won’t be a crack affair, but it’s good enough for a lesson. Will you come down with me that afternoon ? ”

“ I should like it very much.” She thought, even as she spoke, that she might encounter her husband again with Mrs Errington, and schooled herself beforehand. She would be in the company of another man—a man of his own set whom he knew, and had to acknowledge a decent fellow without any personal liking ; for Ainslie had come in contact with Vane-Hurst’s “ riding-off ” propensities in social life, and did not love him. But Lily had no wish that he should love the men whom she meant to parade in opposition to his attendance on another woman. She would prefer him to hate them. The one thing from which she winced in preparation was the sleepy, comprehensive gleam in Jewel Errington’s wide eyes. *She* would know, and understand.

“ Shall I call for you, or would you rather pick me up somewhere ? ” said Teddy easily. “ We can go down in a taxi if you like.

“ No, let me pick you up somewhere, please—at your club if it suits you. I would rather have the carriage.”

“ If we drive we must start earlier,” he said practically.

"It will take nearly an hour to drive down—we'll allow an hour anyhow. Play begins at four. Can you be at the Cavalry at three?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Three o'clock on Saturday then." He drew down an immaculate cuff and scribbled the appointment on it deftly. "But when you really know something about polo and want to see a hard game, you ought to go out to Wembly."

"Wembly! I never heard of it."

"Wembly Park. I expect you've been there to skate, or to motor shows. It's a beastly long way out, but it's good ground when you get there. They really play at Wembly—give some hard knocks too."

"Who plays?"

"Horse dealers and trainers and all sorts," he laughed. "They try some of the good ponies at Wembly—make them too, very often, and sell them to fellows who play at the swagger clubs. We'll go out to Wembly later, when your education is more complete."

She laughed a little, almost encouragingly. "I shall begin to give myself as many airs as your sister!" she said.

"Yes, women always do. When they've learned their ABC they boast they can read any book written!"

"You take rather a condescending view of us. Do you always look down?"

"I have to, mostly." He stretched his long legs and laughed.

"I am five feet eight," said Mrs Devereux suggestively.

"You won't have to look so far to find me."

"Your head isn't so much above my shoulder—if at all," he boasted, smiling at her with a certain lordly approval of her new approachableness.

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Mrs Devereux rose to her feet with a sudden impulse. "Challenged!" she said, and as he rose also she drew her shoulder on a line with his but some inches below. Nevertheless her head with its soft crown of hair rose above the shoulder point.

"Ah, but that's not fair measurement. You ought to take off your shoes and let your hair down," he protested.

"You have shoes too!" she reminded him quickly. "But I will take mine off and you can leave yours on. That will balance my hair, it is not dressed very high."

"It looks very nice," he remarked, suddenly aware of a new richness or luxuriance about the loosened waves, and also aware in some subtle way that he could approve of Mrs Devereux in open speech to-night, and not be coldly repulsed for the audacity.

Lily did not indeed answer directly in any way, for she was stooping to remove her shoes, and wondering with shocked horror if he thought that she had taken too much wine at dinner, for she had never found herself either doing or saying such things with any man even during her girlhood. Whither was Jewel Errington's advice leading her? It had a will-o'-the-wisp tendency as a guide, characteristic of its malevolent author. With a little defiance of her old conventions and ideals she stood up and kicked the satin slippers out of her way.

"You see I am still in the right," she said quietly, as her lifted head rose a little above his shoulder still.

"I could put my chin on your head, anyhow!" he asserted, and the suggested intimacy made her gasp, even though he did not attempt to come an inch closer.

"No doubt—if you lifted your chin," she retorted drily. "But I have proved my point—you cannot look down on me."

"I could not, anyway," he said readily, and there was something of generous homage in his glance. "Are you looking for your shoes? Let me help you." And he dropped on one large knee, and took the slippers out of her hand.

"Thank you," she said calmly, and lifted her foot for the adjustment. He proved himself more capable than she expected, and put on her shoes for her as easily as her maid might have done, albeit he had no shoehorn.

"I wonder why women wear those beastly heels," he said, as he resumed his seat beside her, with an air of perfect unconsciousness as to anything unusual in the late situation. "You can't take proper exercise. It's no wonder you all hate walking."

"I walk a great deal—in the country," protested Mrs Devereux. "And I do not as a rule wear evening slippers on such occasions."

"You would much rather motor anyway, or ride."

"I am learning to ride," said Mrs Devereux, with a little laugh. "And I confess to you that I don't like it at all! I would much rather trust to my own feet."

"*Learning to ride!*" he echoed, in genuine surprise. "Surely you can ride?"

"I have not done so since I was a child, and I find that I am not only out of practice, but it is very difficult to get my muscles into working order again."

"Where are you learning?"

"At that big school in Knightsbridge, or rather out of Knightsbridge. I believe your sister has leaping lessons there."

"Have you a good master?"

"Excellent, I should say. He appears to me a person without bowels of compassion or any mercy for nerves.

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And when he says you must do a thing you find yourself doing it, however reluctant."

"Have they taken you in the Park yet?"

"No, they don't take pupils in the Park until they do the School credit."

"You don't mean to say they told you so?"

"I do indeed! My riding master is capable of emphatic plain speaking, and the most brutal snubbing combined with perfect respect. I should shrink from knowing what he really thinks of me."

"Look here," said Vane-Hurst with conviction, "I don't believe in riding in a school—it teaches you nothing. If I had you out in the road I bet I would teach you as much in an hour as they would in a whole course. I'll take you out one day if you like, either in the Park or out of town."

"You seem to be undertaking the whole of my equine education."

"Oh, well, I didn't mean to lord it over you." He laughed as if a little abashed, and looked more like a big dog than ever—a dog that has met with an unexpected rebuff for being clumsy when he only meant to show his friendliness. "But if you will let me come out with you one day, when your Riding Master *does* think you will do him credit—perhaps I could help you," he added with more diffidence. "I've got a mare of my own that you could ride—she's hardly up to my weight, but I expect she's better than the screws they put you on in a school!"

She looked at him a little apprehensively. He seemed very large and emphatic in the black and white of his evening dress, and she wondered if he would inspire her with sufficient confidence to attempt a gallop on an unknown horse in unknown surroundings, beyond the

confines of the Riding School! The latter had not tended to harden her nerves perhaps, for she accepted the suggestion with caution.

"It is very kind of you, and I think I should like it—some day. I believe they have very good horses at my school, but of course at present I have only been riding the quietest, and I should be very frightened to find myself on a strange animal amongst London traffic. You would certainly have to come too to look after your horse, as well as to reassure me." She smiled at him to sweeten the flavour of her former satire. "Do you know, I believe I must be going on to another house—Mrs Devereux, my mother-in-law, has a card-party to-night. Isn't it getting very late?"

"Oh, it's not much more than eleven yet. I suppose I ought to look for my little sister—she's hidden herself and Digby Errington somewhere."

He rose as she did, and the two tall people looked at each other with slightly questioning eyes. Each found something in the other to-night which seemed a discovery—the woman because she was bent on exploring, the man because he was really seeing a new side of her character.

"Don't be hard on Miss Vane-Hurst—a chaperon is a good theory, but a tiresome practice," she said, with a new cynical lightness.

As they left the sheltered corner where they had been sitting, they came into the tangle of the crowd—those "bunches" into which Lady Malbrook asserted that Conservatives always congregated—but the space in front of them happened to be fairly clear. It happened also that there was at the moment a lower babble of conversation or a pause in the rustle that human beings make on such occasions. In the midst of this pause

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Lily became suddenly aware of a commotion on the outskirts of the crowd where it drifted back from the reception-rooms to the wide gallery branching off from the head of the staircase. And then something happened almost before she could get her breath—people fell back exclaiming—there was a little shriek or a laugh—a man sprang forward too late—and something white and appallingly unexpected rushed into the central space.

It was Lady Sweetie, innocent alike of day or night gear, as naked as a baby Cupid, and trembling with wickedness and fearful excitement !

For a minute there was a hush as one group after another stopped speaking. Those in the background who could not see in detail said : " What is it ? What has happened ? " Those who could did not know whether to laugh or to be shocked. In the midst stood the child, the cynosure of all those eyes, the centre of the situation which she had created, and which she loved.

But the stress of the moment was more than Sweetie had bargained for. She had been forced to concoct her daring scheme alone, because Viva would not have joined her in such outrageous behaviour. It did not satisfy Viva to create a disturbance or to shock people, and some exquisite sense of the ludicrous prevented her taking part in many of Sweetie's wild escapades. So Sweetie stood alone, the small offence on which all those eyes were fixed, and suddenly she missed her clothes. She had only gloated in theory upon the horror of everyone when she put in an appearance to scandalise them, and had forgotten that she must take part in the experience as well as they. Instead of the derisive dance by which she had meant to elude her captors, she stood absolutely still for a minute, a beautiful little picture of growing shame and physical perfection, and then, looking round

for a refuge, she saw Lily Devereux's tall figure standing out in the foreground of those terrible gazing people, and rushed to her and hid her face in the folds of her gown.

Mrs Devereux had not expected the movement any more than Sweetie's first appearance, but by instinct she folded the rich satin skirt about the innocent little body, and looked round for help. It was at her elbow. Major Vane-Hurst, with hardly an apology, took a light shawl from a lady near him and, wrapping the child in it, lifted her in his arms to carry her back to safety and shelter. Mrs Devereux, watching, saw the child cuddle her face against his hard burnt jaw, trying to hide behind his neck, and drowning his mouth and chin with her soft brown curls; and a little quick breath like a sob tore its way from Lily's heart, for she was a childless woman.

Naughty Sweetie, rescued from her own action, recovered her wits sufficiently to plan a masterly retreat even as she was carried off.

"Woke with bad dreams!" she sobbed. (Needless to say she had never been to sleep at all.) "And *knew* there were lots of meringues. Who's all those people?"

"You mischief! You knew your mother had a party, and planned it all," said Major Vane-Hurst accusingly. He could not resist a teasing pinch of Sweetie's fat white limbs as he carried her, and she wriggled and curled herself up closer like a little pig.

"Lady Sweetie! How could you! What will your mamma say? No nice modest little girl would do such a thing!" was Nurse's comment when the culprit was delivered to her.

"Don't care—beastly old clothes! Don't think I'll ever wear them again," said Sweetie, recovering her defiance. "And," she added viciously, "lots of those

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ladies hadn't much more on, either. I could see yards and yards of their backs and fronts ! ”

Major Vane-Hurst fled before his laughter should betray him, and pushed his way through the throng in time to say good-bye to Mrs Devereux, who was just leaving. Perhaps she had waited for him, for in the eyes she turned to his he was still reflected holding the little child, her soft face pressed against his neck—though he knew it not.

“ Good-bye—see you Saturday,” he said cordially, and wondered that she only nodded while her handclasp of his was so genuine. Turning away he came face to face with a mutual acquaintance—a man who knew Mrs Devereux and avoided her as conscientiously as he did other disagreeables in his life.

“ Hulloo, Teddy ! ” said this gentleman languidly. “ At your old tricks again. By Jove ! I should be sorry to undertake all the charity attentions that are thrust on you.”

Major Vane-Hurst screwed his eyeglass into his eye again, and regarded the speaker with an expression that had changed from the benevolent St Bernard to the truculent bull terrier.

“ What do you mean ? ” he said shortly, and his tone was the tone of the bully on the polo-ground.

“ Why, Mrs Devereux in the present instance. About the heaviest woman in London to undertake, eh ? ”

“ It's a pity you don't know her better—only you are not capable of understanding anything above a giggling schoolgirl ! ” said Vane-Hurst brutally. “ I have, anyhow, a great respect for Mrs Devereux and a sincere sympathy for her. I will trouble you not to offer me your d——d condolence for talking to her or to any other woman.” His face had hardened. The square, rough-

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hewn jaw was thrust forward, and the keen eyes were momentarily ferocious. Major Teddy was "riding-off."

"Sorry!" ejaculated the discomfited acquaintance as he drew away.

Had he been a witness of Mrs Devereux's manner and conversation that night it is possible that he also might have modified his opinion of her.

CHAPTER VII

"I don't want no harping nor singing—
Such things with my style don't agree ;
Where the hoofs of the horses are ringing
There's music sufficient for me."

A. B. PATERSON.

THE younger Devereuxs had a house in Pont Street, which Lily found very convenient for the Riding School. She usually drove to Harrod's first on pretence of doing some shopping, dismissed the cab, and took another on to her lesson. In the first days of her painful effort to remove the cause of her husband's gibe that she could do nothing like other people she had been driven to concealing her lessons through shy shame, and had felt a second humiliation in the deception. But of late a new callousness had beset her. No one questioned her comings and goings, and she had her own victoria and could have driven to the School and back in it had she so chosen, and vouchsafed no explanation of her attendance there. It occurred to her mind that it was her own business after all, and not her husband's. She was an heiress when Ainslie married her, and her fortune was safely settled upon herself and the children who had never been granted to her. If she chose to spend her money on any folly it was no one's right to question her. She kept her desire to learn to ride a secret now, simply because she bitterly expected ridicule.

It was the same with the card playing. She had studied bridge as other women might take up Greek, certainly with as much serious application, for it was in her nature to

to be thorough. She had however the head of a mathematician and the memory of a Member of Parliament, and the game presented few difficulties to her in learning it. All she wanted was judgment, and this would come with practice. Mrs Devereux the elder gave card-parties, and Lily attended them as earnestly as she went to the Riding School. Her mother-in-law was too ardent a devotee of bridge to be surprised, and welcomed a member of her party who could always be depended upon both to put in an appearance and to play a sound if not a brilliant game.

“ Besides, it really doesn’t matter if Lily loses a little—she has such a lot of money ! ” she said to herself consolingly. The spirit of the gambler was not however in Mrs Ainslie. She had learned with a purpose of making herself more like other people, and entering into their lives. She had unconsciously gone on playing because she liked it, but increasing skill and mastery of the game made her a winner more often than a loser. She did not plunge, she never risked a weak suit in her declarations, she discarded with a deliberation that was genius ; and she played with a quiet enjoyment of her own skill.

On the night of Lady Malbrook’s party Mrs Devereux the younger went on from Malbrook House to Eaton Square where Mrs Devereux the elder had a bridge-party. She arrived there before midnight and had an hour’s play, after which she went home quietly to think over the events of the evening. She had held good cards, and had pleased her partner—a club man whose admiration would have been denied to the most fascinating woman on earth if she had trumped his best card. But for all that Mrs Ainslie Devereux knew, with an unusual thrill of power, that his eyes sought hers across the table with a double approval because she was well-gowned and well-

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groomed. The sense of power—feminine power—was new to her, and subtly intoxicating. She had smiled upon the club man, ostensibly in congratulation of their partnership, but in reality as much because she knew her own value for the first time.

When she said good-night to him he returned her lead as neatly as he had at the card-table. "I wish you would ask me to call, Mrs Devereux," he said, with disarming friendliness. "Are you ever at home?"

"I will try to get up a foursome," said Lily kindly. "Do you know if Major Vane-Hurst plays?"

"Yes"—but he made a wry face. "I object to him as a partner, however. He is never in the wrong."

"That must be quite as trying in an opponent," she laughed. "If I ask him I will play with him myself, anyway. Lady Malbrook will come and make the fourth, I daresay."

"Or Lady Herring? She is the better player."

"I don't know her very well——" Lily hesitated. "But that does not matter," she added, collecting herself. "I will know her better if she is a bridge player."

They shook hands cordially. "I wonder why people think that woman dull?" mused Ernest Chateris to himself as he strolled home to his quarters in Half Moon Street. "She doesn't say smart things certainly. But she is very jolly and nice, and undeniably handsome. Pity her husband is running Mrs Errington so openly—deuced bad form!"

Lily Devereux was thoughtful as she drove home. Lady Herring was Ainslie's friend rather than her own, and if she asked her to make one of the bridge-party it would sooner or later be sure to come to Ainslie's ears. The only reason why it had not yet reached him through her

mother-in-law was the somewhat strained relations between Mrs Devereux and her son, over the Errington scandal. There was no open breach, but Lily knew that there were certain things they dared not touch upon, and Ainslie's married life was one of them. She divined that Mrs Devereux would not discuss her pursuits; whereas Lady Herring had no such scruples. Well, it did not matter. She had learned to play too well to fear criticism. Besides, she had only taken his advice—to her own advantage as it chanced. She would certainly ask Teddy Vane-Hurst to make one of the party, in spite of other men's reluctance to play with him, for she liked Teddy, and he fed her new sense of power—fed it better than any other man at the immediate moment. There was a little smile on her lips as she alighted at her own door and entered the hall, and it hardly froze even as she unexpectedly encountered her husband.

He was coming from his own smoking-room at the back of the house, and was evidently on his way to bed, for he yawned slightly when he stopped to speak to her as in duty bound.

“Just in from the Malbrook party?”

“No, I went there early, and on to your mother's.”

“I'm afraid you had a dull time there. They were playing bridge, of course.”

She smiled faintly. “Yes, of course.”

“I thought of going myself, but I left the club so late it wasn't worth while.” There was a discontent and weariness about Ainslie that betokened him out of conceit with his world.

“They are playing now,” remarked his wife quietly as she moved towards the staircase. He stood aside to let her pass, but as she lifted her heavy satin gown in her hand to mount the stairs he arrested her.

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"Oh, Lily, I've asked a man to lunch here on Monday—Stiggert, fellow who shoots in Africa."

"Monday!" repeated Mrs Devereux thoughtfully. "Oh yes—I shall be in to luncheon. But I am engaged in the afternoon." (She had a lesson at the Riding School at three o'clock that day. The morning had, unfortunately, been full.)

"Some of those damned charity meetings, I suppose," muttered Ainslie. His wife's engagements, as far as he knew, were invariably connected with sales of work or other charitable objects. She frequently took stalls at bazaars, and even opened such functions herself. "Well, I don't know that you and Stiggert would have much in common," he remarked, with a short laugh.

"We shall meet at luncheon anyway," was her undisturbed comment. "And I can ask Muriel to make a fourth if you like."

"Yes; but if you are rushing off immediately after it looks rather like breaking up the party! Shall I ask him to come on Saturday instead?"

"I am engaged on Saturday afternoon, too."

"You could throw it up for once."

"I don't want to, thank you," she said, and laughed openly, with inward amusement. If he had known that she was going to call at the Cavalry Club at three, and driving to Ranelagh with Teddy Vane-Hurst, she wondered what he would have had to say! The situation began to entertain Mrs Devereux very much. She vaguely regretted that she had missed so much amusement for so many dull years, and, with the innocent excitement of a child at present, she wondered how soon her husband would begin to realise that she was no longer alone and neglected—that other men sought her society—that she also could be a success! She pictured his face when it

dawned upon him, and eagerly altered his expression in her own mind to haughty surprise, anger, expostulation, jealousy—twisting her mental picture of his features to flatter herself. There was a little silent laugh in her eyes as she reached her own room and, going in, turned the key deliberately in the lock. She had done so many times before with a sore heart, feeling the humiliation of his desertion in that there was no necessity to safeguard her privacy. It was he who had deserted, not she who had denied. But to-night there was a meaning in the action, a forecasted triumph. Some day he would come back—and knock.

Ainslie Devereux watched his wife ascend the stairs beneath frowning brows, and with a half-absent attention. She was a stately woman in her satin bravery, and he recognised her good looks. It was a pity that she should be so dull ! She had bored him at a very early stage of their married life, and he had been driven into other distractions—or so he thought. For he laid the blame between them to her account, rather than his own. It had not been his fault ; at least he never accepted it as his fault, even when her relations and his own displayed silent disapproval. He thought he deserved sympathy rather than condemnation ; for a man with social qualities, a favourite in his set, is hardly used by Fate in being handicapped by a woman who is to all intents and purposes a failure. To-night he was out of tune with all his world. The affair with Mrs Errington was drawing to an inevitable end, and he had not the furious pursuit of his desires to push every other consideration out of his mind. It had been purely physical, and the reaction left him without regret, without any feeling but a vague discontent. He was ashamed also that it should end so soon, and he knew that it was going to end. Jewel's

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treatment of him in the Park the other morning had only quickened the process, and made him a little surer that he had reached the limit of his endurance. He was not disillusioned, because neither of them had ever pretended that it was anything but a natural passion—particularly Jewel. There was a frankness about this lady's escapades that forbade any man to flatter himself that she had surrendered her heart and was at his mercy. She would not care—there were fresh victims, newer and more absorbing. But for his code's sake he disliked the idea of a break with her, and would fain have drawn out the links of the chain before he freed himself. An Englishman's morals are so curiously illogical that they bewilder the traditions of other nations. It was not a question of remorse or honour so much as the decency of the thing, with Ainslie. Where a Frenchman is a light-hearted sensualist, and a German a sentimental brute, the Englishman regards his follies with a solemnity that invites complications. Ainslie Devereux pitied himself very much on account of his womenkind as he went up two stairs at once to his dressing-room. He heard the little click of his wife's door as the key locked it, and that, being his own decree, was another injury.

It was Mrs Devereux who was enjoying herself in the present stress of things. She dressed for Ranelagh on the appointed Saturday as a child going to a first party, and was afraid lest her maid should discover that she had any unusual excitement in view. Surely the woman suspected her already, from the night when she had altered the dressing of her hair to the present instant when she selected a favourite gown with would-be unconcern ! For she had not yet realised that a servant respects a mistress who can get into mischief as long as she can keep clear of the consequences. The maid would have

taken far more interest in her had she known her destination, than she did supposing that Lily was bound for some dull public function, which was what she really thought.

The gown at any rate was becoming, and the holiday mood of its wearer was not less so. Lily Devereux felt as if lessons were over and play was beginning as she got into the carriage and gave the footman the number in Piccadilly—she did not say the Cavalry Club. It troubled her all the way that she must stop in such a public thoroughfare for all her chance acquaintance to see, waiting for her escort; but she need not have disturbed herself. Major Vane-Hurst was standing on the steps as she drove up, lighting a cigarette, and he tossed it into the gutter without a regretful glance as he came down to the carriage and took the empty seat at her side.

"I was giving you five minutes' grace—ladies are not usually so punctual," he said, with an approving glance at the bay horses as they dashed forward. "I hope you won't find it too hot—I am taking you down very early."

"No, I don't feel the heat," Mrs Devereux assured him, and her cool, unflushed face bore her testimony. "I wanted to be early—I am absolutely excited to think that I am going to see a polo match and really enjoy it!"

He had turned in his seat to look at her in laughing surprise. "Well, I hope you will—it is a very nice of you to say so, anyway," he said. "I can't think why this hasn't happened before, though. We must have both been at Ranelagh or Hurlingham heaps of times."

Mrs Devereux thought she knew very well, but she did not say so. She put down her new spirit of adventure entirely to Mrs Errington, not realising that she had been long drifting to some such outbreak of her slighted womanhood, and that she had only arrived at a point

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where her appeal to her rival was a natural outcome. Mrs Errington's advice had merely hastened matters, but Teddy's innocent wonder that she had so long been in the background seemed to her a fresh accusation.

"I told you—I seldom go to polo matches," she said with a soft haste. "What a lovely day it is, though! It makes all the difference to see such places in fine weather."

"It makes a lot of difference to the ground too," he remarked practically. "Look here, I've been thinking what you said about riding lessons. I'm sure you can't get any good in a School. Anyhow I wish you'd let me come down one day and see how they teach you. Ten to one it's all wrong!"

"I shall be horribly nervous" laughed Mrs Devereux. "But I am sure you will approve of my master—he teaches your sister, you know."

"That chap! Oh, I believe he's all right. He has done Dulcie a lot of good, my father says. I haven't seen her in the saddle lately. . . . Anyhow I'll come down to the School and fetch you one day. I've never been there, and I want to see it."

"Very well. I am going to have a lesson on Monday, three to four. Only *please* don't come too early. I shall really be very unhappy if you are watching all the time."

"I'll come at a quarter to four—that suit you? But you mustn't be nervous with me. I only want to help you."

He spoke so kindly that her heart went out to him as to a friend. She remembered him as she had last seen him with Sweetie in his arms, the rosy, naughty face pressed against his neck, and the child's soft body held so softly against his great chest. He was no longer merely the "other man" by whom she meant to challenge her

husband's attention—she felt almost ashamed that she could have thought of using him for this. He assumed a personality, and one to be valued, but devoid of sex.

"I don't think I could be really nervous, even under your criticism," she said slowly, and a little gravely. "I am so sure you would be charitable."

"That's right. I'm never hard on women. I think they have a deuce of a time as a rule, poor little souls!" he said, with genuine pity. "What we say is natural in ourselves we always call vice in them, and we've made them hypocrites by insisting on their being prudes. When a woman lies it's always because a man's frightened her into it."

"I can't imagine myself being frightened into a lie—I might be ridiculed into it," said Mrs Devereux, with most unprecedented self-revelation. Her reserve usually prevented her even admitting her own point of view, and limited her conversation to surface things because analysis was too intimate. But he seemed so much a comrade as to have got beyond the outer walls of acquaintanceship to-day, and she thought, at some future date, of confiding her reason to him for striking out a new line for herself, or even telling him of that strange interview with Jewel Errington. Perhaps some day they might be such real friends that she could refer indirectly to her husband's enslavement by that other woman, and her own desperate resolve to regain her place. She glanced at the big figure beside her, and it did not seem so utterly impossible. It was a novel pleasure anyway to see the usually empty seat occupied, and stranger still by a man who appeared somehow to fill it naturally.

As they turned in at the gates in the Castlenau Road they overtook and passed a hansom containing the very

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man with whom Mrs Devereux had played bridge a few nights before. She bowed and smiled, and Vane-Hurst lifted his hat in acknowledgement of the other's salutation, but without any marked pleasure.

"That reminds me," said Lily. "I have asked Mr Chateris to come and play bridge one afternoon. Will you make a fourth if I ask Lady Herring?"

"Oh yes, thanks—I should like it," he answered, but she noted a trifle more of ceremony in his tone. "D'you know Chateris well?"

"Only as a bridge player."

"He's an awful ass at that," said Major Teddy, with great outspokenness. "I played with him one night at White's——"

"Yes, he said he had played with you."

"He didn't give me much of a character, I expect. Well, I don't mind saying that there's no love lost between us."

"Would you rather not come, then?"

"Oh yes, I should like to come." He hesitated, and she wondered if he would say what was in his mind and ask her not to have Chateris. It was quite impossible in the circumstances, but the game of playing one man against another was beginning to amuse her even more than bridge. She looked at him with a little smile as the carriage drew up at the house, and he helped her to alight, ignoring the superfluous footman. He had not yet got so far as to express his desires plainly to her.

"Then if you come you will bring a peaceable spirit, and not argue," she commanded in her new *rôle* of Queen Woman, and his keen eyes flickered oddly for a moment as they met hers.

"As you wish it," he said courteously, and she passed into the cool depths of the hall from the summer heat

outside, her heart beating a little with the sense of being newly crowned.

I have a great love for the Club House at Barn Alms, with its wide marble hall and red blinds. It is all so pretty and so gay, and a welcome respite from the ugly Hammersmith highroad and the hot commerce of the streets. London is at a very little distance, but it seems thrust back from the very gates through which the favoured find their way and leave the envious to bewail a lack of passes. Mrs Devereux paused aimlessly before the list of dinner guests, which she did not really see, to enjoy her last sensation.

"If I had thought you would like it I would have engaged a table and we could have dined here," Vane-Hurst's voice said over her shoulder.

"I will—some day," she answered, with a little feeling of recklessness. For to bring a male escort to a polo match to explain the game seemed a sober and legitimate thing—to dine with him in that happy place of fresh air and lights and music quite the opposite. Yet she would enjoy it—oh, she would enjoy it! She had been monotonously unhappy and dreary for so long, her youth demanded that she should come out into the sunshine a little and do as her neighbours did in some delightful fashion.

It seemed that he would enjoy it too, for his voice had regained its pleasant ease of comradeship as they made their way to the Barnes Ground. People were already beginning to drift in that direction, and Vane-Hurst was keenly anxious to secure good seats. He looked at his watch and began to walk as if for a wager.

"Come along—we have not too much time," he said, as brusquely she thought as if to another man. "I will try to get you some tea later—when the match is over."

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"I don't mind about tea—I want to see the game," she gasped, for he was striding over the turf at a pace that made it almost necessary to run to keep up with him. His long legs carried him ahead of any feminine pedestrian toiling in his wake, and it was evident that in his enthusiasm he was apt to forget the grace allowable to the weaker sex.

"Do you know if you go so very fast I think I shall have to run behind!" she panted at last, with real amusement in her tones. No other man of her acquaintance would have omitted to pay her the bored courtesy of waiting on her steps, she felt sure, and somehow she liked the omission. It seemed to make them less conventional and more frankly friends.

"Oh, I beg your pardon—I really am awfully sorry!" he said, slackening his speed, and looking down on her with the benign smile that took the harshness out of his face. Teddy Vane-Hurst combined the odd mixture of the martinet and the knight-errant in his six feet two inches. "I was anxious to get good seats," he explained. "But I forgot you might get tired. You must stop me when I do things like that."

"I am considered a good walker," said Lily meekly, as they crossed the rustic bridge and passed the espaliers where the roses hold court round a little stone Negro boy who is always in doleful mood with the English summer. "It was the rate at which you were going that I could not cope with."

"In spite of your boasting the other night that you were almost as tall as I am," he reminded her triumphantly. "And the sensible heels you always wear when you go into the country!"

"I don't count Ranelagh as the country," she expostulated.

"So you feel justified in wearing four-inch heels!" he retorted with intention. "After all, I need not have hurried you," he added penitently as he ushered her into the pavilion. "We are almost the first."

They sat down in a corner and waited, until the seats began to fill and the teams to collect themselves on the ground, with that supreme indifference to punctuality or deference to onlookers that only a polo player can assume. Two or three men in red or white waistcoats gambolled on to the green spread of turf and proceeded to charge at a small white object which they sometimes hit and more often missed, turning their ponies to get them in hand before the game, without of course any intention of showing off—oh no! they were loftily blind to the rows of women in gay colours and black or tweed men in the chairs under the trees and in the pavilion. Being a member, Vane-Hurst had the advantage of taking Mrs Devereux into a shady corner where the sun could not dazzle the game before their blinded eyes; but the people under the trees were blossoming into gay blots of parasols all down the row.

"Now do you know anything about the game at all?" Major Teddy said with business-like directness.

"I know they all try to get the ball—" Mrs Devereux hesitated. "And they knock it past those posts, don't they?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Vane-Hurst at this amazing definition of the rules of polo; though could he have known it one half the people sitting round them were no better instructed in spite of having seen the game a hundred times.

"The teams are four a side—see that?" he said rapidly, as the players at last lined up and the umpire threw in the ball. "Now see that fellow on the grey, a

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few paces behind the others? He's the Back, and probably the Captain. He has to defend his own goal and try to get the ball through the opponents' goal posts if he has a chance."

"But there is another man playing 'Back' as you call it for the White team!"

"Well, they must both have a back. The man they call Number One makes the running for Number Two as a rule, and Number Two has to make goals if he can—that is, hit the ball between the opposing team's goal posts. Number Three backs up Number Two and if Two misses gets on to the ball. He ought to be ready to defend his own goal too, if Back happens to get out of place."

"It looks exactly as if they were all trying to get the ball at once," said Mrs Devereux complainingly, trying to disentangle the bunch of men and ponies as they worked to get the ball into the open. "I'm sure they are none of them doing the things they ought to do."

"Any decent team will play into each other's hands, and forgo their own chances if another man has a better one of making a goal," said Teddy hurriedly, his eyes darting after the players as the ball at last flew away towards the Red team's goal, and the Back galloped to intercept if for all his pony was worth. "Ah! well hit! See that back-hander? Clean under his pony's tail."

"Another man has got it," said Lily, catching a reflection of the excitement. "See how those two are riding after each other!"

"The Whites will have them in a moment—they ought to have ridden off Number Two. They can't get a goal that distance—see them pass the ball?"

"But they didn't pass! That man pulled back."

“ Pass the ball to each other, I mean. Number Two couldn't get a shot so he passed to Three. 'You'll understand better if you watch closely.' ”

“ You must think me very stupid ! ”

“ Not at all—I like teaching you ! ”

He turned his eyes from the game for an instant to look at her, and her blood ran a little faster for a moment even though her eyes still remained fixed on the players. No man had ever owned to liking to help her timid efforts at comprehension. A languid explanation demanded by politeness was all she had ever looked for if she had asked questions concerning masculine interests. And she feared she had a slow brain, the truth being that she was more thorough than other women in trying to master the details of things that taxed her ignorance, and more honest in owning to very surface knowledge. But here was someone who thought her drawback an advantage since it gave him leave to teach her ! No wonder that her heart warmed to him with gratitude, and perhaps a little triumph too. For being a woman she read the expression in his eyes through the tone of his voice, without having to acknowledge to herself that she had actually seen it. Vane-Hurst's glance was not all due to benevolence at the moment.

The bell rung in about another four minutes, leaving the Red team with a goal to the good. For a subtle reason that no man can quite value Mrs Devereux plunged at once into a discussion of the game, during the two minutes' breathing space while the players changed ponies. She wanted to know what the off-side rule meant, the vexed question of crossing, the result of a foul, and the penalty exacted. It was quite legitimate that she should question, after his avowal of liking to instruct ; but it gave Major Teddy no chance to be any-

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thing but a mentor, and left him with an unsatisfied feeling that was too vague to be classified.

The next chukker held an excitement. The White Rabbits got on to the ball first, and drove it towards their opponents' goal at once, as if determined to make up lost ground and become the attacking party. An exciting five minutes followed, during which the Captain of the Red Team was hard pressed for his defence, and White's Number One did wonders in riding-off, and Number Two and Number Three passed with bewildering rapidity. But in wheeling to avoid a collision, Number Three's pony slipped, rolled over and over like a cat, and was engulfed for a moment in a *melee* of struggling hoofs and sticks, with his rider. There was a running "Oh!" along the line of spectators, and broken words that voiced fear. "—— ridden over!"—"—— bring a hurdle!"—"—— is he—no!—up again!" and then almost before the Umpire's whistle had stopped the game the capsized man and pony emerging together,—a swing into the saddle,—a fresh rush while it seemed that man and horse must still be dazed with the fall. The attacking players clung to their advantage, and, in spite of the Red Team's plucky defence, when the bell rang for the end of the period the Rabbits had scored a goal.

Mrs Devereux leaned suddenly back in her seat, with a new expression in her eyes. She had realised that a game may carry its penalties—for anyone interested in one of the players. Her eyes left the absorbing field for an instant, and rested on the broad shoulders and half-turned face beside her. It was Vane-Hurst this time who appeared unconscious.

The last part of the game found Mrs Devereux more silent, and her replies to Vane-Hurst's remarks and explanations were monosyllabic. He turned round to her

when the final bell rang, and the Red had been proclaimed victors by five goals to two, and looked at her with a new attention.

“Are you tired?” he said.

“Oh no!”

“Bored?”

“Not in the least.”

“You are very silent then,” he remarked, as he pushed back his chair and rose. “Come and have tea.”

She smiled a little comically. “If a woman is silent it is always because she has a headache, or wants her tea, isn’t it?” she said rather teasingly. “As a matter of fact, I was thinking——”

“Don’t try to understand the technicalities all at once,” he advised kindly, with an innocent obtuseness that made her suddenly laugh and sigh together. “It will seem much more simple the more you watch it.”

“What a boy you are!” she retorted unexpectedly. “Am I fourteen also that I should think of nothing but the rules of sport?”

It was his turn to laugh, and he looked down with some curiosity at her as she paced along by his side with her head a little lifted in ruffled dignity. He even screwed the eyeglass a thought tighter to enable him to examine this new mood, but he saw nothing save the fact that she was looking very well, as he had said,—exceedingly well, in that subtle assertion of feminine rights that claimed something he seemed to have missed.

“Well, what *were* you thinking about?” he said. “I see that my instructions were quite superfluous. You were not attending!”

“Indeed I was! You may put me through an examination if you like.” She turned her head as they crossed the bridge again, and looked away down the stretch of

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quiet water, one green glimmer in its setting of green trees. "Polo seems to me a horribly dangerous game!" she said abruptly.

Major Teddy was aghast. "My dear lady, where does the danger come in? There is absolutely none if you observe the rules." His utterance was always softer and quicker when he argued, as if he held himself in reserve. She had begun to judge his mental attitude by his tones.

"How was it that man came down to-day, then?" she said obstinately.

"His pony slipped—he turned too quickly."

"Well, that might happen to anyone."

"It was his own fault though—you can't blame the game for your own carelessness. A fellow knows if his ponies can turn in a scrum or not. Besides, he wasn't hurt."

She did not answer, and her lips closed a little wistfully as they sat down under the trees. Beyond them stretched that loveliest of old gardens within sound and sight of London, whose clipped yews have overlooked many generations of fair women with a beauty as soon out of date as their gowns. All round them on the lawn was a gay-coloured crowd, and the low English chatter ran on like an accompaniment that was yet not their part of the music. Vane-Hurst had chosen his table wisely and well, not in the thick of the crowd, or too far to catch the attention of the officials in red coats, but on the outskirts of the throng under a great beech-tree.

Lily Devereux was conscious of a childish pleasure in it all,—the well-dressed, careless people, the lovely grounds, even the tea and the brown bread and butter. She had only a very medium sense of pleasure connected with

Ranelagh hitherto, and she looked at Vane-Hurst's substantial person and keen rather brutal face as if she found him a magician. Surely the fact of mere masculine attention could not so affect her as to change the outlook of things! She felt a little vulgar, and glanced about her for distraction.

"What a curious thing it is that all the waiters here are like old actors!" she said restlessly. "Do look at them, Major Vane-Hurst—did you ever see anything so curious?"

"All types too," he agreed. "Comedy and tragedy and drama—but they all look as if they came off the stage."

"There is something of the jockey about them also. Perhaps they are superannuated polo players!"

"Did you enjoy the game?"

"Yes, really, very much."

"Next time we play you must come down and see us. We have rather a good team in my regiment."

"Oh no!" she exclaimed with a soft quick breath, as if an involuntary horror took her. Then more gently, "I should miss you so if you were playing—there would be nobody to explain it to me."

"I thought you could pass an examination already."

"Oh, don't tease me!" she said, with a sudden earnestness that amazed him. "Can't you see that I *won't* see you play?"

"How very unkind!"

"Supposing your pony slipped—and it isn't the game very likely, but it comes to the same thing when one is watching—and of course you know your pony's capabilities, but that won't save you in the rush!"

Her incoherence and the flurry in her voice gave him a

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new insight. She pulled herself up half-laughing, as if a little ashamed of her outburst. "You see I am a poor rider myself—it makes me horribly nervous to see an accident!" she added.

He sat looking at her steadily across the tea-table for a long minute. Perhaps he was a little flattered, but being as he was it is certain that he was more touched by the suggestion of personal interest. Vane-Hurst was not a vain man so much as a sensitive one under his most ferocious exteriors. He was extremely receptive to kindness, and there was nothing but kindness in Lily Devereux's eyes. They were almost maternal in their anxiety. But he could not judge the tone of his own voice as he answered her.

"My dear child, I wouldn't ask you to see me play if it cost you the least unhappiness—you know that. I only wanted to show off before you, because I hoped to approve myself in your eyes—that's the real truth. All men are like that when a woman interests them."

"And all women are afraid for men when they are interested, I suppose," she said as frankly as he had spoken. "I know I was a fool—but it was when that man fell—I thought it might have been you!"

"I trust I'm a better horseman than that!" said Teddy, with his nose in the air. "But it was just as sweet of you to think of it!"

"I am so glad I did not live in the Middle Ages—I should never have enjoyed a tourney, even though my particular knight were as unconquered as Lancelot!"

"I wonder what your particular knight would have been like?"

"Oh, he would have had a beard!" said Mrs Devereux with a flash of audacity in her eyes as they rested on the clean-shaven face across the table. "And he would have

been quite a small man compared with those of to-day, according to the size of the suits of mail that have come down to us."

Teddy squared himself a little. "Thank you!" he said. "I suppose your hero is dark?"

"Of course. Men and women always admire their opposites."

"I beg your pardon, I think not. At that rate my ideal would be a small dark woman, whereas——"

"I have finished tea," said Mrs Devereux politely, rising to her full height and turning her fair head away from him carelessly. "Don't you think we ought to make room for other people?"

He followed her along the terrace and into the house, perforce, and the only remark she hazarded was that it was past six, and they must really be getting home. She had forgotten, until that moment, the chance of an encounter with her husband and Jewel Errington, but while she waited for the carriage she glanced round with momentary apprehension, and was relieved to find that they were not in evidence. There had been no especial attraction at the club this afternoon, and the chances were against their being present; but earlier in the day she would not have shrunk even from the encounter—now some subtle element even in the desultory chat across the tea-table gave her a greater feeling of responsibility. It was too intangible for danger, but she had a sense of having made strides in an intercourse that had been barely begun a short time since. Vane-Hurst had gone out obediently to look for the carriage, but the end of his interrupted sentence was only delayed. As Mrs Devereux lifted her dainty skirts to step into the vehicle she tripped, and a big hand slid under her arm with an instant strength that lifted her clear of the step and into her seat.

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“ I was going to say,” remarked Major Teddy steadily as he sat down beside her and the carriage turned into the drive, “ that on the whole I should select a tall fair woman, however misplaced she may seem in my preference.”

CHAPTER VIII

“ And how the palfrey snorts and pulls !
Now, Mary, help poor wandering fools !
The palfrey pulls, and he must go :
The lady's hand may not say No.
And go he does : the palfrey goes :
Merry again the palfrey goes.”

LEIGH HUNT.

LADY SWEETIE'S escapade was considered so serious that Lady Malbrook was driven to distraction to devise a punishment solemn enough for the offence. Finally the child was deprived of the mental and physical delight of coming down to dessert for a month, and the edict was conveyed to her with due gravity. Perhaps a similarity of tastes helped her mother to decide that the deprivation would be a sufficient punishment, for in her heart Lady Malbrook loved sweets. She knew that the good things fed to her by her indulgent father were a violent joy to Sweetie, who was a splendid Pagan, and the atmosphere of the lighted room and the glittering dinner-table filled her little soul with ecstasy as she posed amongst the guests. Her appearance at dessert was the one time when Lady Sweetie felt angelic and behaved in kind. There was something in the dainty lace frock and the ephemeral blue ribbons that fired the artistic spirit in her, and perhaps a glimpse of her own image in the nursery glass may have forced her into an appropriate pose. For it must be confessed that it was really a pose ; the dining-room was the stage for Sweetie's exquisite appearance and manners in her dainty laces, and the

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guests were her audience. She could no more help acting her *role* than she could help the tragic touch in her tropical beauty.

The Beaumans did not appear at the Riding School for a week after Lady Malbrook's party, and then it was only on account of health that they were sent back there. Sweetie, of course, was in such general disgrace that anything for which she showed a preference was to be denied her, and Viva had asked to be allowed to wait until they could go together again. She was really fond of Sweetie, and a certain loyalty made it seem dull to have any of their mutual enjoyments without her : and in the second place there was the fear, deep down in her heart, that unless there were two of them they could not claim the attention of both masters, and owing to her tractability she was likely to be taken in hand by Durban alone. The story of Sweetie's naughtiness had gone round London to an accompaniment of mirth whose least echo was carefully suppressed from the child herself.

" If Sweetie knew that it was regarded as a huge joke, and talked about, she would regard herself as a heroine ! " said Lady Malbrook in despair. " It is best to be utterly silent on the subject, as if it were too dreadful to speak of."

Deprived of her sweets and most of her treats, Sweetie sulked in the background of her small world, and became unusually subdued. When she reappeared at the School nurse confided the cause of the trouble to Durban with a really scandalised horror. " And before all those people too ! I can't think how she escaped, and of course her ladyship must blame me, but I thought the child was asleep ages ago. There's no getting even with her ! "

The Assistant Master did his best not to laugh, but the joke was too good to be kept to himself. He beguiled

his superior out of hearing to share it with him, and they shouted. There was no trace of amusement in the Riding Master's face, however, when he met Lady Sweetie in the School, and the severity of his manner conveyed to the delinquent without direct reference that he had heard all about her peccadillo and was properly shocked. She looked at him askance from her long Egyptian eyes, and brooded on her wrongs, but there was no open rebellion. It was Viva who touched upon the subject to him directly.

"It's so stupid of Sweetie!" she said, knitting her delicate brows. "I suppose you've heard what she did? She went down into mother's party without her clothes, and now she mayn't come in to dessert or do anything nice."

"Well, my lady, that serves her right. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," said Viva, with a sigh. "But Sweetie doesn't see that. She's only angry. She goes and does things, and never seems to think that there'll be any afterwards. And there always is, you know!"

Had the Riding Master read "*Sapho*" he might have thought of *Pas de lendemain*! But he was guiltless of Daudet's acquaintance. He only looked down a little amused at the unconscious philosophy of Viva's remark.

"Yes, there's always an afterwards. We've got to remember that, haven't we? If I go hunting and rush my horse at a big jump without thinking what's on the other side I deserve a fall, don't I?"

Viva shuddered slightly. "I hope you don't fall, do you, Lancelot?" she said anxiously. "Do you go hunting often?"

"Not now—I used to when I was a boy. And everybody must get tumbles, my lady. It's one of the best things to learn in riding, to know how to fall."

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He was thinking more of his next pupil than of his present one, for the Beaumans' lesson was followed by Sydney Errington's. As the two little girls rushed upstairs to the gallery, flushed with exercise and full of vitality, they met the delicate, pallid boy coming down. He came slowly and shrinkingly, as if every step were an effort, taking him to an ordeal that he dreaded, and as he passed the two boyish figures—so far more boyish than his own in spirited strength—his pale wistful eyes looked from one to the other as if he were abashed by their very courage. Viva merely glanced at him and ran on to find her nurse. He was a plain, sickly-looking boy, she thought, and to her love of beauty he was distasteful and a thing to be avoided. But Sweetie's suppressed devil caught fire at the mere look of poor Sydney, obviously a muff and afraid. Her eyes grew dark and wide, and the bad temper in her prompted her to bully if she could,—to jeer at any rate. As she passed him she put out her tongue to its furthest extent, and then looking over her shoulder proceeded to make faces expressive of her contempt. Sydney had stopped, fascinated, at the first exhibition of the tongue, and stared at her helplessly.

"Silly little boy! Milksop! You can't ride—pony'll throw you and bite you—I know!" said Sweetie in a fierce whisper. The awful prophecy followed poor Sydney down on to the tan, while his persecutor ran on up the stair and emerged into the gallery face to face with Mrs Errington. The two looked at each other with instinctive interest as they passed, though the lady had hardly noticed Viva gazing at her with a greater admiration from the background. The frown on Sweetie's face which had lingered after her encounter with Sydney changed to a shy smile. She looked up with the most

engaging wickedness. Sweetie always divined her affinities by instinct.

"Who is that handsome child?" said Mrs Errington quickly to Durban as the nurses led the two boyish figures away.

"That's Lady Sweetie Beauman," said Durban, with a dry smile. "The greatest pickle we have in the School!"

"She looks a little devil!" said Mrs Errington quietly. Then under her breath, "I wish she were mine!"

"She's in disgrace just now," said Durban. "Her last escapade was to run downstairs without any clothes on one night when Lady Malbrook was giving a party! Right into the middle of the guests!"

Mrs Errington did not go to Lady Malbrook's parties for obvious reasons, and did not happen to have heard the tale from anyone who had been there. She lifted her red mouth suddenly, and broke into a peal of laughter.

"Ah, how *good*!" she said. "In the middle of all those heavy, ponderous people—bah! I know the set one would meet there! And the little one thought that she would wake them up a bit, give them something to think about outside their stupid conventions? It was delicious!"

"It was outrageous!" expostulated Durban, in spite of his amusement.

"Outrageous things are always delicious—they are the salt of life," said Mrs Errington languidly, sinking down into the chair in the "Royal Box," and leaning her chin in her hands to watch the lesson taking place below her. "I also can be outrageous!" she said to herself as Durban moved away. Her eyes followed the two figures in the School, the strong fair man, instinct with energy and resolution, and the slight nervous child whose hands trembled even now upon the reins. A tempest of fury and

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contempt swept over Mrs Errington's face for a moment, hardly moving it, but making it as wonderful as a Fury's. "If that splendid, reckless child were only mine!" she said through her teeth, the vision of Sweetie rising up in contrast to her own boy. "If I could only have a child like that!"—her gaze followed the two figures, as if she would devour them with the lovely flame of her godless eyes.

Sydney had been several times to the School during the week of the Beaumans' absence, and had learned, because he must, to sit upright in the saddle and to guide his pony himself. He did not enjoy his lessons any more, and they were obviously a period of torture to him, but the first paralysis of fear had passed and left him in possession of his senses. The Riding Master mounted his own horse now, and rode instead of walking beside him, and for the first time this morning he had no leading rein. Sydney noticed this with a quickness born of his dread.

"Aren't you going to lead me, please?" he said in a small trembling voice as his master turned the pony's head and began to walk his own horse round the School.

"No, you must learn to manage your pony by yourself now. You are quite big enough to do that," was the reply that filled him with dismay. Sweetie's wicked whisper was ringing in his ears, "Pony'll throw you and bite you—I know." He thought of the half-bred, vicious little brutes he had seen in the Argentine, and the prophecy seemed only too likely. Perhaps that bewildering little girl with her savage beauty and boyish dress had ridden this very pony and knew its tricks!

"I'm afraid——" he began, looking up at the Master with the old fascination that glued his eyes to the resolute face.

"Don't look at me—see what you are doing!" said the Master sharply. "There is no need to be afraid—I can manage your pony and my horse too without a leading rein—see!" He threw himself suddenly across the pony, taking the reins from Sydney's hands and stopping it dead with one movement. There was a certain free grace in the very movement, displaying as it did a complete mastery of both animals and his own seat. Upstairs in the gallery the solitary watcher leaned a little further over the velvet of the "Royal Box" and drew her breath between her teeth as if with an untameable pleasure.

"There!" said the Riding Master, recovering himself. "You see I could save you in a moment if the pony did anything wrong. Now put your heels down as I told you, and your hands, and try to trot. I want your mother to see how well you are getting on."

Spurred by the reminder of who was in the gallery watching him, Sydney braced himself and jogged painfully for a few minutes, trying to rise to the motion. But his effort was obviously without any confidence, and it prevented his getting his balance. He sat too tight to be shaken into "hoisting."

"Look here, don't stiffen yourself," said the Master, checking the horses. "Hold with your knees, but don't hold too tight or you can't rise at all."

"I'm afraid of falling!"

"It wouldn't hurt you if you did fall on the tan," said the Riding Master. "And remember when you do fall to lie still—the pony will not touch you, he will step clear of you at once. Horses are much cleverer than you know. Now then!"

He put the animals into a trot again, and saw with a glance that Sydney was sitting looser, trying to rise, but

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evidently still hampered by his fear. Suddenly, as they were coming quietly down the School, the Riding Master gave the child a gentle push which lost him his insecure seat in a moment and he tumbled off while the pony trotted on a pace or so as if hardly missing him and then stopped of himself. The Riding Master stopped at once and was out of the saddle and helping the child to his feet. Sydney had not even uttered a cry, he looked too taken aback, as much at the Master's unexpected attack as at the fact that he was quite unhurt.

"There you see, it wasn't such a dreadful thing after all!" said the Master, laughing. "Are you bruised at all? Shaken?"

"I don't know," said Sydney, his puzzled eyes on the quiet pony waiting by himself. "Please, did you do that on purpose?"

"Yes, but I promise you that I won't do it again. I wanted you to see that you can fall without hurting yourself. You won't be so afraid again, will you?"

"The pony didn't bite!" remarked Sydney enigmatically. He was thinking of Sweetie's threat, but the Riding Master, having no clue to the situation, thought it only a silly fear in which the child indulged himself.

"Of course not," he said a trifle impatiently. "Our ponies are not wild beasts, or vicious in any way. Now mount him again and see if you haven't more confidence."

In his desire to help the child in spite of himself, the Riding Master had forgotten who was watching from the gallery. He remembered too late, but there was nothing for it now but to treat the matter as an ordinary incident of training. He did not lift his eyes again throughout the lesson, and was a little justified in his own mind by the fact that Sydney really seemed to have profited by the harmless fall, and forgot to cling so ten-

aciously to the saddle. In consequence he began to save himself from the jolting of the trot unconsciously, and towards the end of the lesson could hoist himself a little quite naturally.

"That's much better," said the Riding Master cheerily, as he lifted him down. "There, that's enough for to-day. Don't you feel you've got on, yourself?"

There was a trace of colour in the child's pale cheeks, and a little grateful smile on his lips as he nodded. Poor Sydney! he was very gentle and confiding by temperament evidently, and inclined to cling to anything stronger and more masterful than himself. In a girl it would have been attractive, but in a boy it was only to be tolerated. Encouragement seemed to help him, however, and the Riding Master accompanied his pupil back to the gallery with his hand on his shoulder.

"We got on better this morning," he said to Mrs Errington, as she rose to meet them. "I hope you were not alarmed when he tumbled off. It won't happen again, and it was the best thing possible for him."

He knew that his own agency in the fall must have been patent from the gallery, and was going to offer a further apology and explanation of his methods as soon as Sydney was taken charge of by his dark nurse. But Mrs Errington did not give him a chance. Her eyes were flashing with excitement, and her red lips parted with her quickened breath.

"You were splendid!" she said in a rush of words that seemed beyond her control. "I know why you did it. It is just what he wants—to be forced to do things—to be like a boy! If you were in charge of him. . . . Oh, I have had such frightful difficulty to force him to be like other boys. I wish I could tell you. I wish we could work together!" She broke off, as if there were something

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more to be said that yet might not be expressed. But her eyes still flashed messages at him that he could not read, perhaps because of the brilliance, perhaps from some indifference in himself. He only saw the obvious difficulty she had in training a timid boy to take his position in the world, and met it with offhand sympathy.

"He will probably outgrow it, madam. He looks a delicate little chap, and as he gets stronger he will get more fearless. He rides better already. It is very often a question of health."

She looked at him still, with eyes that suddenly narrowed and sparkled oddly. They drifted over him, from his capable face, a little flushed with the recent earnestness of the lesson, to his broad shoulders and chest, and down to the smart riding boots. He looked instinct with health himself and animal life as he stood before her, quite unconscious of her scrutiny.

"Ah!" she said softly, and the sound was as an in-drawn breath. "You and I are both so full of health and strength—it is no wonder we are not afraid!"

The Riding Master moved to the table, and sat down in a business-like manner to make the entry for the next lesson. He removed his hat and laid it down on the table beside him, and Mrs Errington from behind his back had a view of the bright shapely head and the ripple of his short hair over the top of it. It was strong hair, growing thickly, in spite of being cropped short, and had that look of youth and health which goes with the animal vitality she had noticed. From behind him, as he sat there, the Riding Master without turning round heard her tell Transito, the nurse, to take Master Sydney home at once without waiting for her, as he was hot and tired. And then came the sound of his pupil and the nurse leaving the gallery, and

their feet upon the stairs, which he realised without comment.

"And what day will Master Sydney come again, madam?" he said, turning the page.

Mrs Errington moved up to his chair behind him, and bent down to read the engagements already there. He caught the faint, sweet scent that lingered about her, and was aware that she seemed hardly able to see, for she bent rather low. As she did so she laid her hand, carelessly, on the broad shoulder nearest her as if to support herself.

The Riding Master sat still. He neither spoke nor turned, and the lady had not answered his question. The hand upon his shoulder began to speak instead—plainer messages than her eyes had done. For the space of a minute there was complete silence while he sat there quietly, in as absolute control of himself and the situation as if he were on his horse, while she read the entries in the engagement-book over his shoulder. Then she raised herself deliberately and stood up.

"I am afraid I can't send the nurse with him to-morrow, and I don't like him to come alone," said Mrs Errington coldly. "Will the next day do?"

"Perfectly, madam. The same time?"

"Yes, the same time," said Mrs Errington, and swept out of the gallery without a backward look. She did not seem to remember to say good-morning.

The Riding Master stood up and pushed back his chair. He hesitated a moment, and then walking into the "Royal Box" called to one of the men who were smoothing the tan.

"Jim! Go and call a cab for that lady who has just left, if she has not her carriage."

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It was to be a day of unusual incidents for the Riding Master at any rate. His next pupil was Mrs Devereux, but he did not see her arrive, as he had gone into the stables to give an order to one of the grooms. When he came back into the School she was standing by her horse already, talking to the man who led him. This of itself was an amazement, because Mrs Devereux was always nervously silent. She did not seem to know how to get into conversation with any class but her own, and even in that she had been a failure for lack of adaptability. But the same tenacity that had taught her, slowly, to play bridge and to overcome her first nervousness in the saddle, was coming to her aid now, and she was being rewarded for her effort by finding that even in the man holding her horse was a specialist in his profession at least. For if the groom people will talk to you it follows that they must be interesting because they know only one thing and have had time and inclination to learn no other; They will talk Horse—and again Horse—and again Horse. They are a peculiar race, the groom people, and they marry early.

As the Riding Master approached he heard Mrs Devereux say: "I am afraid I always cling to the curb for safety, and they don't like it as a rule I believe."

"Well, 'orses is like people," said the man, as he put the reins into her hands. "You've just got to learn each one. You can't take 'em in a bunch. This 'orse goes better on the snaffle to my thinking—the curb takes 'is mind off what 'e's doing, and 'e's always fidgeting about it, ain't you, Sonny?"

He had mounted Mrs Devereux even as he spoke, and turned to pat the animal's neck again. The horse reached forward, dragging at the reins as if to be sure

that the obnoxious curb was there to annoy him, just as a nervous man will keep on cutting his chin against a high collar by craning his neck. Mrs Devereux, with new intuition, allowed the curb rein to slip through her fingers, and tightened the snaffle. The groom stepped back, touching his forehead as he caught sight of the Riding Master, and looking a little foolish.

"Now, madam!" said the Riding Master, swinging into the saddle and wheeling both horses briskly. "I want you to try to handle your horse more to-day. Turn him with one hand, and use your heel. Take this stick."

He handed her the short riding stick, and she took it composedly and put her horse at once into a trot. As a rule she merely obeyed orders without initiative on her own part, but to-day there was more individuality and enterprise in her riding, and the Riding Master's quick grey eyes noticed it. Thanks to the groom's hint she managed her horse with more sympathy between them as well, and the Master saw fit to encourage her.

"You are getting on much better to-day, madam," he said, as they turned and twisted and handled the patient animals under them in the narrow confines of the School. "Don't you feel more confidence yourself?"

"Yes, I think so," said Mrs Devereux, smiling. "But I fancy you inspire confidence. How much is due to me, and how much to you, I shall not know until I get out of the School."

"Would you like to have the next lesson in the road?"

"I thought you never took pupils out until they did you credit?" said Mrs Devereux, with most unusual recrimination.

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The Riding Master gave his little short laugh, and it was a genuine amusement. "You would do us sufficient credit now, madam," he said, "and yourself too if you rode as you do this morning. Don't get nervous, and don't think too much of the traffic, that is all."

"I don't think I care much about the Park," said Mrs Devereux, with a sudden shadow on her face. The new look of animation faded for a moment, and he saw the old reserve and dull endurance that he knew.

"We could go to Battersea, it is less crowded," he suggested, and she brightened again.

"Ah, yes! That would do," she assented.

The Riding Master had no clue to his pupil's new sociability, and, had he been a conceited young man, might have been suspicious of it after his very recent experience. But he showed no such sign at least, and chatted as courteously in the pauses for breath as if she had been little Miss Dulcie, whose tongue never flagged. Mrs Devereux had right inclined and left inclined, right circled, half circled, halted, left wheeled, and performed half-a-dozen military manœuvres, before the Riding Master said, "Rest now for a bit," and began to walk slowly down the long length of wall, away from the gallery. The pupil was a little flushed and breathless for a minute, and he accepted the silence, but was soon to have it broken again.

"I suppose you have had some nasty tumbles?" said the surprising lady, in her new mood for conversation.

"Yes, madam. But there are fewer accidents in the hunting field than you would imagine—fewer accidents with consequences at least. A horse will always avoid trampling on you if you lie still where you fall. It is when both of you struggle that you get kicked."

She looked at him with some curiosity, but she could by no means conjecture the picture in his mind. The Riding Master had once found himself lying half in and half out of a brook with his horse's fore feet planted on his shoulders, looking up under the brute's chin. He did not remember very well what happened next. The horse freed his hind-quarters from the sticky ground somehow, and somebody seized the Riding Master by the collar and dragged him out of the water. Then he mounted again, and came up with the hounds before the finish. It was fortunate for her peace of mind that he had never told Lady Viva this story.

It was Mrs Devereux who began the conversation again, and so unexpectedly that the Riding Master was almost startled.

"Do you ever go to Wembly?" she said, with apparent irrelevance.

"To Wembly, madam?" he echoed, looking round at her with a new puzzle in his grey eyes.

"I hear there is a good polo club there."

"Oh! Yes, I have been there. It is a fair ground."

"Have you ever played on it?" It was her turn to be surprised.

He smiled. "I used to play when I was younger, when I could get the time. I am not inclined for such hard work now."

"You are quite a young man!" said Mrs Devereux kindly.

"Yes, but things one does at twenty, one does not do eight years later!"

She wondered if it were true. It seemed to her that she had begun at the age he mentioned to take risks she would have feared at twenty. Men, it seemed, were

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more reckless in youth than women, who developed a similar quality later. But she forgot that he spoke of physical things, and she, appropriately, of mental.

"Is Wembly a long way out of London?" she asked vaguely.

"Oh no, it is quite easy to get at. You go by train to Baker Street and change," he said practically.

"If one drove?"

"It would be rather a long way."

"Ah!" she said, and pondered on the suggestion in her own heart of a long drive—in company. Well, it was part of her play; the more she flaunted such excursions in male society, the better for her scheme. She wondered the next moment if she were likely to encounter the Riding Master, and incontinently hoped not. Yet it was not unlikely, for he might be supposed to have an acquaintance amongst the large horse dealers and breeders of polo ponies who helped to support the Wembly Club.

"I enjoy watching a good game," she began, and then both she and the Riding Master turned at the corner of the School and no longer had their backs to the "Royal Box." They both looked up, and she paused, tongue-tied.

"There is somebody in the gallery," said the Riding Master quietly. "Is it a friend of yours, madam? Because, if you object to strangers seeing the lesson, I will tell the men to ask him to wait in the office. We don't allow anyone in during a private lesson, save with the permission of the pupils."

"It is Major Vane-Hurst," said Mrs Devereux composedly. "He wanted to come to the School, and I said I had no objection. I think you teach his sister?"

She could control her voice, but she could not control

the colour in her face, or her hands. She thought it was the novel position she was in in inviting a cavalier to audience her lesson that struck her suddenly into trouble. For, though she wished to advertise such behaviour rather than otherwise to her own world, there was no occasion to impress the Riding Master, and perhaps for this reason she felt herself embarrassed before him. It was the situation rather than the man, for it certainly could not be Teddy Vane-Hurst for whom she blushed. Had he been singled out in her mind at all, she argued, it was as one who was to be exempt from the general male crowd she meant to attract—one more worthy to be kept as a friend since she had seen him with a little child in his arms. . . . Yet the blood rose to his presence in agonising disquiet, and the horse she rode felt the secret involuntarily confided to him (before the Riding Master shot his quick glance at her tell-tale cheeks), and broke into a trot. The rest of the lesson was a spasmodic effort on the part of the pupil, and business-like ignoring of an audience on the part of the master.

"You made me so nervous!" Mrs Devereux said, laughing, as she appeared in the gallery at last and the tall watcher rose to meet them.

"I thought you rode very well," said Vane-Hurst, raising his hat again in acknowledgment of the Riding Master's "Good-morning." "But you can't learn anything in a school."

"I am going out on the road next time."

"All right, I'll come too, and have a lesson also!"

"Indeed, you will not!" she laughed. "The Riding Master would not undertake you."

"They have had the family temper to encounter before," said Teddy coolly. "My sister learns to

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jump here, doesn't she?" he added, turning to the Riding Master, who had taken his inevitable seat at the table before the engagement-book. He turned round to answer, a little smile round his lips. He knew Major Vane-Hurst well by sight, and would have recognised him in the gallery if he had been standing up, or he himself had connected him in the most remote fashion with Mrs Devereux. But no one certainly had been further from his thoughts. "How does she get on?"

"Very well, sir—if she will only take the trouble to learn, Miss Vane-Hurst will make a very good horse-woman. But she is in rather too much of a hurry. She wants to shirk difficulties."

"Ah! Like all women," said Teddy largely, with a little teasing smile at Lily Devereux. "They create the difficulties first, and then expect to avoid them."

She did not answer in words, but there was a little mutinous flash in her eyes as they met his. The Riding Master had turned again to the engagement-book, so of course he could not see, and the back of his fair head could hardly have been as a sensitised plate for the recording of human emotions. Yet as they passed out of the gallery together—for Lily would not wait to change her habit—the Riding Master sat very still, looking up and down the entries as if he saw something new in them. Curiously enough the names on the page before him were as the list of parts in a play—"Devereux—Vane-Hurst—Errington—Devereux"—of which, perhaps, he only saw a fragment in the acts. He turned the page slowly, looking back, and again saw the trilogy—"Devereux—Vane-Hurst—Errington."

CHAPTER IX

"The wide gulf that parts us may yet be no wider
Than that which parts you from some being more blest ;
And there may be more links 'twixt the horse and his rider
Than ever your shallow philosophy guessed.

You sin and *you* suffer, and we, too, find sorrow,
Perchance through *your* sin,—yet it soon will be o'er :
We labour to-day, and we slumber to-morrow :
Strong horse and bold rider ! and *who knoweth more ?* "

ADAM LINDSAY GORDON.

MRS AINSLIE DEVEREUX'S bridge-party was a success, and in the natural course of things it reached her husband's ears about twenty-four hours afterwards. Ainslie had strolled in to Tattersall's, not because he meant to buy a horse so much as that he had an hour to spare, and of all things a good horseman loves looking at a good horse. There is a great peace and quiet in the famous stables on a Sunday afternoon, and the crowd of well-dressed people have an air of entering a temple and worshipping at the shrine of some heathen god as they pass down the rows of powerful hind-quarters and come to a standstill before their particular deity clothed and stalled and waited upon by his priest of a groom. Something church-like there is too in the softened light of the big paved square, and the darker atmosphere of the stalls beyond, and something appropriately hushed in the brief statements of the high-priest grooms and the responses of the worshippers. Have you ever noticed how people drop their voices at Tattersall's ? Even their remarks to each other have the subdued reverence of

those partaking in a religious ceremony, though it may be an alien creed, and their saunter past the stalls is decently unobtrusive and has none of the swagger, the come-to-see-and-be-seen air, that characterises a crowd in the Park.

Ainslie Devereux found Lady Herring in stable No. 3, looking at a brown deity from whose polished side the groom-priest had respectfully flung back the clothing. She was critically regarding his long lean quarters and appeared rather doubtful in her admiration of his legs.

"Won't do!" said Devereux in subdued tones, without waiting to be asked. "No jumping power—and look at his hocks!"

"Yes, they are a little swelled. But that may be too much work."

"Don't believe it. He's a kicker!"

"He has got good withers. You don't know what that means to the comfort of a side-saddle."

"I don't like his second thigh!"

Lady Herring sighed and dropped her glasses. "He's been hunted with the Blackvail," she said. "And it isn't every horse who is up to my weight. I ride thirteen stone!"

"Well, he's not a weight-carrier!" said Devereux with a disgusted nod at the discredited deity. "Some of Bob Chateris' horses are up I see. It's a genuine sale—he's going out to Africa to shoot koodoo. Come and look at them."

Lady Herring gave a last glance at the brown horse and followed her guide down the stalls, across the courtyard and into stable No. 1. Here the candidates for purchase were of a stronger build, with more substance and shorter legs. But it is the invariable advantage of the hunter that if he is well bred he looks his profession, whatever may be his special points.

"I always feel that I am amongst ladies and gentlemen here," said Lady Herring with grim satisfaction. "Really, Tattersall's is the only place nowadays where one *may* be assured of the company!"

"In the stalls, at anyrate," said Devereux, raising his hat with great politeness to the wife of a noble cheesemonger. "I wonder what those people come here for!"

"Lord Stilton is learning to ride," remarked Lady Herring, with unholy satisfaction in the statement. "He hired a horse, and went up to Regent's Park to practise. You know that foot and a half of ashes they have opposite the Botanical Gardens? Well, all the Jews and Turks and Infidels and Heathens who have never ridden before go there to fall off in comfort and privacy. Stilton goes too—Digby Errington saw him and told me. Now he's quite a horsey man, and his wife comes here to consider which entries are good enough for him to buy!"

Devereux gave a disdainful snort, and swung down the line of equine aristocrats. He did not at all object to ennobled tradesmen in their order, but he did object to their appropriating the virtues of families trained to other accomplishments than the facilities of counter and till. "I believe Lady Stilton's very religious, too," he said savagely. "I know my wife meets her at Church gambles."

"Ah! Does she raffle the cheeses at bazaars?"

"Something of that sort. I suppose she encourages Stilton on earth that he may be ready for riding on white horses in the next world! Isn't there a tradition to that effect to compensate good Christians who go afoot?"

"I never make plans for heaven," said Lady Herring, with a sigh. "A good many people do, I know—they

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arrange regular family parties to meet there, and leave out all the disagreeable relations. It seems to me that it will be surprising enough to find oneself there at all. I should not dare to question the entertainment provided ! ”

“ Or the company ? ” said Ainslie with a sneer. He walked through the stable and paused before the last three horses in the row. “ Here are Bob’s beasts,” he said. “ I know that grey—he’s a flyer. The black would carry you all right—plenty of substance.”

“ By the way,” said Lady Herring, lifting the saddle-cloth for herself to look at the black horse’s splendid carcass. “ I met a Chateris at your house yesterday—not Bob, the brother.”

“ Ernest Chateris ? Don’t care about him—he’s a club man. Always hanging about town.”

“ He plays bridge,” Lady Herring explained. “ That was what he was there for.”

“ To play bridge ? ” said Devereux, with faint ridicule in his tone. “ Why was I not invited ? Was Lily martyring herself for you all ? There has not been a bridge-party at my house for months since I asked some fellows in one night, and we played in the smoking-room. Lily went to bed.”

“ Lily didn’t go to bed on this occasion,” said Lady Herring drily. “ She played a very good game, and enjoyed herself immensely. ”

Devereux was of that type of Englishmen whose looks at least never betray them. There was not the least trace of surprise or incredulity in his expression as he looked smilingly at Lady Herring. His very blue eyes were if anything a trifle more satiric.

“ I am glad to hear she is getting on,” he said, as if the fact itself were no news to him. “ Perhaps in

time we may play together like a model couple whenever we are asked to a card-party."

"I don't think Lily will be willing to play with you," said Lady Herring with cheerful brutality. "Other men are keen to have her as a partner because she is broad-minded to their selfishness and she never loses her head. Her self-possession is masterly."

Devereux laughed outright, and it sounded quite unstrained. "Who was the favoured man yesterday?" he asked.

"Teddy Vane-Hurst, and he is no easy partner as you know. He makes mistakes through sheer pigheadedness, and she covered them. Chateris had to put up with me, and he was not pleased."

Devereux's attention had apparently wandered to the horse. He pointed out to Lady Herring that there was a good deal of the pony in his breed, and he thought a fair amount of pony blood in a thoroughbred as good a type of hunter as she need desire. The black was good-tempered and plucky to the end; if he had a fault it was that he was a bit of a puller.

"I'm as strong as a man," said Lady Herring, drawing up her tall figure instinctively. "He needn't think to play tricks with me. The real difficulty I expect is his price. What d'you think Bob Chateris wants?"

"I don't believe he's reserved. He'll go under the hammer."

"Well, I'll look in to-morrow if he's going, and trust to luck," said Lady Herring resignedly. She patted the long neck and looked into the horse's full dark eyes. "I like your face, old man—you're honest, and you mean work! Well, Ainslie, will you come and have tea at the Bath?"

But Devereux excused himself, and having seen her

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into her motor he turned and walked up towards the Corner.

There was nothing even now in his face or figure to betray that he was very angry. An Englishman's face is his fortress, as much as his house is his castle. Behind the implacable mask of utter indifference lurk the grim guns of his temper and the defending force of his pride. Ainslie was not yet, however, at white heat, he was only irritated to aggressiveness, the more so in that he could hardly justify himself. His only complaint against his wife was that she had nearly made him look a fool by his ignorance of her doings, and by her apparent intimacy with two men for neither of whom he cared. As to her actual playing of bridge, it was no concern of his. He had insisted on going his own way, and had left her to go hers. But then he had presupposed that her way was to be composed of charity bazaars and infinitely dull dinner-parties at which he himself looked askance; and he felt this new outbreak on her part was unjustifiable because it found him unprepared. He had, of course, forgotten his own brusque advice to her to learn to do as other people did. What really galled him was that Lady Herring, who he accounted a friend of his own, seemed to be in danger of reverting to his wife, and that Lily had further established the nucleus of a set into which he was not invited. Lady Herring, moreover, had been the one to give him news of the bridge-party, and had he not been perfectly under control her keen amused eyes would most certainly have perceived his discomfiture. It appeared to him monstrous that he had not known—the more so in that Lily had not made the least effort at concealment. She had had her friends in her own room—the sitting-room where he never set foot—the preceding afternoon, and part of

the time he must have been actually in the house. It was chance that he had not encountered them, but it was evidently a matter of indifference to her whether he did or no. All she had done was not to inform him of the matter. But then they had never spoken of their mutual engagements for the past three years. It had been his decree again, and that made him more angry still.

As he passed through the crowd at the Corner, and so on up Piccadilly to his club, he remembered that he had encountered his wife one evening last week—the evening of the Malbrooks' party—and that she had looked unusually well. She had told him that she had been to his mother's, and that there was bridge there. It flashed across his mind now that she herself had been playing, whereas he had thought of her as an onlooker. He had not been to see his mother of late, or he might have gathered which way things were tending before this; but it added to his sense of discomfort that the older Mrs Devereux must have been better informed of his wife's development than himself. Had everybody known it, and he alone been in the dark? Everybody, in Ainslie's vocabulary, meant of course the units within the narrow confines of his own acquaintance. Lily had no right to hoodwink her husband like this. It was scandalous.

He was haunted by the vision of her in the lamplight of the hall, as he had last consciously seen her; for to say truth they had met very little since, Devereux himself having been out of town for the week end. She had worn a long satin gown that had suited her (he had always known that she had a good figure, and being a short man he gravitated to tall women), and her hair was more decently done than usual, or so he thought.

Was this all the outcome of her sudden plunge into the dissipation of bridge-playing, or had it an older date? He thought that in all probability it had, being shrewd enough to know that women pass through stages of inertia or develop by degrees, and concluded that it had been coming to this for a long time, while he had been blind. Unlike Lily, he did not lay it all to the charge of Jewel Errington, not only because he did not dream of his wife's wild appeal to her, but because he would not have credited a sudden conversion even if he had. He did, however, think that there must have been a special stimulant, and looked for it to be masculine as a matter of course. His point of view was quite simple, and is the pitfall of many husbands. If a woman begins to feel for and demand her power, or to assert her individuality, it is for the benefit of some unknown man to whom she is posing. In the present case he was ludicrously wrong, for if there were any male object in Lily's thoughts it was himself. But the original force that had set the machinery in motion—the woman's lost self-respect and rebellion against neglect—were an inconceivable motive to him.

The image of his wife accompanied him sedately all up Piccadilly and into his club. It seemed inclined to take oral if not visual form too, for in the smoking-room he discovered Lord Malbrook lurking behind *The Daily Graphic*, and pensively surveying a scene in the Lords in which he had taken part two nights before, and in which he was discomfited to find himself represented with what looked like Lord Rosebery's hat hind side before. He appealed to Devereux to sympathise.

"I say, Ainslie, ain't it disgraceful? I shall support the Press Censure next time D'Arth brings it in!"

"I don't admire your legs!" said Devereux critically,

leaning over the injured peer. "And where did you get those trousers? No wonder you lost the division—you're a disgrace to your country!"

Lord Malbrook groaned. "I should like to take that journalist fellow to Eustace Miles and give him a dinner!" he said revengefully. "He's bilious!"

"Call at the office with a big stick and pretend you're an American," advised Devereux, lighting a cigar. "Better still, sell him a horse."

"Journalists don't buy horses—they hire."

"So does half London. We're all so broke over the motor craze we sell our gees and trust to the livery stables. Look at the Park any morning! We used to ride our own hacks there. Now they belong to anybody."

"Deuced good mounts, too, some of 'em," said Lord Malbrook ruefully. "I can't afford to keep such horses as the job-masters send out. By the way, I hear you've persuaded Lily to take horse exercise at last. I thought she pleaded funk."

Ainslie's hand with the match in it paused half way from his mouth to the ash-tray. He puffed for a second as if to be sure the cigar had caught, and his lids fell over his blue eyes as he did so.

"I didn't persuade her," he remarked carelessly. "It came in its own good time. I never persuade a woman—if they don't work out their own salvation they will blame the Lord Himself."

"It's very good for her, anyway. Women take too little exercise," said Lord Malbrook sententiously. "Look at Firefly! In ten years she'll be a human cushion, without shape and void!"

"Well, you can sit on her then. Who told you about Lily? I thought" (he lied well) "that it was to be a surprise."

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"Oh, Sweetie was my informant. Lily goes to the School where my kids learn, and Sweetie came squeaking with excitement one day, that she had seen Cousin Lily in a habit." (He forbore to add Sweetie's kindly aspiration that she could see Cousin Lily try to ride and fall off—it would be such fun! "She would go all sprawly, sprawly, and they'd have to heave her up!") Sweetie was always realistic in description, and it carried a picture to her father's mind of Mrs Devereux's generous figure on the tan, and her many inches outspread.)

"Oh, Sweetie!" said Ainslie, with a disagreeable lift to his upper lip. "She is the devil's own instrument for curiosity." But he remembered something now—a name in the engagement-book at the School that had puzzled him for the moment, until driven out of his head by more insistent interests. "Mrs Ainslie Devereux" had been quite plainly written upon the page where Sydney Errington's first lesson was to be entered, and he had wondered for a moment if she had booked an hour in her own name by mistake and were coming in charge of some friend's child to act as a spy. That his wife's grave, wide nature was equally incapable of a lack of dignity or generosity with regard to her rival was beyond his knowledge of her. He was discomfited again, however, to find that the entry must have referred to herself, and reverted to Lady Sweetie to cover the situation. "I was present at one of her lessons," he told Lord Malbrook. "Or rather the end of it——"

"She rides well," said her complacent father, to whom the spirited figure and tossing mane were a secret source of dissembled pride.

"She was not riding on this occasion," said Devereux grimly, "for the very simple reason that she had defied

her master and been sent back to her nurse in dire disgrace while Viva went on with the lesson alone."

"Phew! There must have been a shindy!" said Lord Malbrook, with a responsible knowledge of the subject. "Is the—er—the Riding School still standing? And the master still alive?"

"Very much so. He appears to be a person of at least as strong a will as Sweetie, and it is to his incalculable advantage that he has the stronger physique!"

"She has been known to take to the methods of savage warfare," murmured Lord Malbrook dreamily.

"I don't think she bit or scratched—I rather fancy she was afraid of the immediate consequences."

"Impossible!" Then Lord Malbrook's tone of amused satire changed to sharper interest. "I won't have the child cowed!"

"Oh, she won't be cowed," said Devereux with a short laugh. "Good Lord! do you suppose that imp of wickedness would be cowed by a little wholesome exercise of authority? Be thankful that she has met her match for one hour in her day at least!"

"What sort of fellow is this riding master?"

"A very decent sort of chap, as far as I could see. He impressed me with a sense of brisk attention to the business of the moment that made me feel an idle drone—'pon my word he did! He's so beastly alive, you know," said Devereux, with a very unusual assumption of languor. Lord Malbrook looked at him from behind *The Daily Graphic* and his own full beard, and the result of his scrutiny was hidden. He remarked that the barometer was rising, and invited Ainslie to stay and dine with him. "Firefly is out of town, and I'm a grass widower until Tuesday," he said.

But Ainslie declined. An hour ago he would have

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accepted as a matter of course, for he had no engagement, and Sunday was an off day ; but the events of the past hour had the effect of making him morbidly desirous of meeting his wife again and seeing whether the change in her were an actual one to his physical eyes. He excused himself on the plea of an engagement that did not exist, and went home, only to find the house empty. Mrs Devereux would not be in to dinner, and her husband felt as injured as though he were in the devoted habit of dining with her every day, and she had voluntarily destroyed a *tête-à-tête*.

He sat down to irreproachable cutlets and delicate sauces, in high dudgeon. It was so very annoying that he could not add neglect to the list of Lily's crimes. She had most thoughtfully provided a dinner at which no man could cavil, and had forborne to eat it herself. That they very seldom dined together unless other guests were present was easily ignored. She ought, of course, to have been modestly at home whether he appeared or no, awaiting the psychological moment when he should reappear on her horizon at the other end of the unimpeachable damask. The butler did not know where Mrs Devereux was dining ; she had merely said that she should not be at home. Ainslie gnawed the end of the little fair moustache that he still wore in spite of clean-shaven fashion, and regretted that he had no excuse to swear at the cook.

He wondered with whom she was dining, and began to speculate more and more darkly as the hours went on. At eight o'clock he merely surrounded her with a Sunday dinner-party to which he was a stranger, but at half-past he suspected her of a restaurant and a *partie carrée*. By nine he went deeper still, and he wondered, properly scandalised, if she could be so far advanced in reckless-

ness as to be dining with Chateris alone—or Vane-Hurst. He would almost rather it were Chateris, for Teddy's bluntness had tasted acrid on his tongue on several occasions. Only Vane-Hurst was a decent, straight-going chap, and no menace to husbands. A kind of connection too, through a cousin having married a Devereux. With men like Chateris you never knew where you were. How could Lily be such a fool as to dine alone with Ernest Chateris at the Olympic! He was sure, by ten o'clock, that it must be the Olympic. He had taken Jewel Errington there in the earlier stages of their acquaintance. Which shows that men are apt to be biassed by their own methods, and the trend of their experiences, to the blinding of their judgment.

Half-past ten—eleven. Then the hall door was opened by an immovable footman, and he heard his wife's voice in the hall, saying good-night to someone. Ainslie opened the smoking-room door and walked out quietly to ask Chateris to have a drink. It struck him as the most devilish courtesy he could assume. He was met by an exclamation.

"Why, Ainslie! Lily and I had no idea you were at home—I'm sure Dulcie Vane-Hurst told me you were going to Worcester with them. If we'd known you might have come too. We've had such a lovely day—we took the train to Staines, and went up on the Keene's launch."

Ainslie bent dutifully and kissed the faded cheek his mother offered to him. It was an interesting fact that he felt his wife's proven blamelessness in the company of the elder Mrs Devereux made him far more furious than if his suspicions had been correct, and her escort had been Chateris or even Vane-Hurst. He glanced at her as she gave her wrap to the servant, and found her young and blooming in her river hat and summer gown, the

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light of recent pleasure still in her eyes and on her lips. She was smiling a little, and appeared hardly to have realised his presence. The smile somehow referred to the past day, and had no space for him in it—not even the courtesy of acknowledging him.

“I hate river parties,” he said crossly. “Who was there?”

“No one but ourselves and the Keenes. It was Lily’s suggestion. If she had not hunted me out I should have spent the day frowning in town. It has made me feel ten years younger!”

“You are looking very well, you know,” said the younger woman, in a tone of quiet congratulation that was the rarest tact. Her eyes rested upon her mother-in-law with the animation of a girl, but the composure of her figure was the assured acquirement of the married woman.

“Dear Lily! You will make me quite vain.” (Ainslie smiled in a wry fashion to hear his mother absorb the implied compliment. “Lily has learned the value of flattery!” he said in his heart. “Another discovery!”) “I won’t keep you up any longer—we are both tired with our outing. Don’t forget Thursday!” She waved a thin hand with a studied gesture and turned to the door where a taxi was still visible in waiting. “Good-bye, Ainslie. You haven’t been to see me for an age—you are too full of engagements I suppose!” Her voice was colder, a faint offence in the final clause which he knew was aimed at his engrossment with Mrs Errington. Even his mother, it seemed, was more gracious to his wife than to himself, and he chafed at the innuendo. He was so accustomed to be popular that the mere suggestion of his wife supplanting him hurt his vanity. He escorted his mother down the steps and saw her into the taxi in

silence, returning to the hall to find his wife leisurely regarding herself in the mirror. She pulled a wave of hair a trifle looser, and altered the angle of her hat in feminine fashion, without regard to his presence even when his image crossed the glass behind her. On the whole she seemed pleased, and he noticed that she was humming the air of a popular waltz as she surveyed herself.

"I am glad the excursion was successful!" he remarked with rigid politeness, pausing with his hand on the smoking-room door.

She turned her head as if surprised, and looked at him as curiously as a child might have done, with large calm eyes that seemed to recognise him for the first time.

"Yes, thanks," she said carelessly. "It was a very jolly day. I think your mother enjoyed it."

"I suppose you did too——?"

"Oh yes—I enjoyed it too!"

She laughed softly, as if some reminiscence amused her, and his blood ran hot in his veins with the first conscious sting of jealousy. The male factor that he always suspected in her enjoyment loomed up on the horizon again, tantalising him by its very indefiniteness.

"Keene is an amusing man, isn't he?" he said, lingering with his hand on the door-knob. The words seemed jerked from him.

"Oh, very!—I think I'm going to bed. One gets tired with so much fresh air. Good-night."

"Good-night!"

She turned to the stairs as once before, lifted her gown in her hands, and began to ascend, humming "*Quand l'Amour meurt*." He did not wait to hear her lock her bedroom door this time. He went into the smoking-room again and shut himself in first, to brood on his lack

of complaint against her. For after all what had he to say but that she had gone for a picnic up river in company with people against whom he could find nothing to say, and with his mother, and that she looked young and happy and successful in spite of the fact that her husband was notoriously neglecting her ?

He did not mean to let a woman who was already his own property trouble his peace. He certainly did not mean to follow her, a derogatory proceeding unless Man the Hunter is pursuing a novel quarry. Yet the days that came after seemed to direct his steps unconsciously in the direction where she might be met. He knew so little of her movements in the past that his memory was a blank as to where she might be found ; and it was tantalisingly impossible to guess her present haunts. His mother's house and the Riding School were positively the only places to which he had the assurance that she had been. At the former he feared to appear as the jealous husband, scenting for news of his wife—such a new *rôle* that it was intolerable ; but towards the Riding School his wilful steps seemed always diverging, until one morning he saw her carriage pass him and draw up at the entrance in the dull long street. It was empty, and evidently only come to fetch her after her lesson. Nevertheless it gave him a slight shock, as if his unacknowledged purpose had materialised before his eyes. He wondered if the coachman had seen him, and turned hot at the thought of his own position. The only course left him seemed to be to enter the School as if that had all along been his intent, and legitimise his own folly. He passed the arched windows from behind which came the clink of iron rings in the stalls and the jingle of harness, and turned in abruptly at the open doorway. From the office on the right a man came forward at once to interro-

gate him. Mrs Devereux? No, she was not in the School—she was riding on the road to-day with the Master. Would the gentleman wait for her? She was due now from her lesson.

“Thanks,” said Ainslie in a voice that sounded a little unusual to himself, and went up the stairs and into the gallery from which he had watched Viva take her lesson. There was no one there, and he sat down with his back to the School, at the round table in the centre of the gallery, and began to turn the leaves of an out-of-date magazine without seeing the pages. His throat felt dry and hot, and he was aware of an angry quickening in his blood. He did not know what he meant to do, but he instinctively guarded against his wife seeing his face as she entered. There was danger in his eyes and in the veins round his compressed mouth—the passion of the male animal in the grip of human restraint.

Suddenly he heard feet upon the stairs, a little laugh that he knew to be his wife’s and that yet sounded strange to him, a broken remark to do with the recent ride. Then she entered, humming the same waltz he had heard before, and walked up to him without recognition or thought of him.

He rose and looked at her. It had been a dull morning, and the School was rather dark; but it seemed as if life and colour suddenly entered the gallery with the woman whose impetuous entrance had startled him with a sense that this could not be she. His wife, as he knew her, moved slowly, a handsome woman always, but with a ponderous weight even in her good looks; this woman who was coming towards him reminded him of a full-blown rose in her abundant beauty, over-full and ripe to fall—but he should be a lucky man who should gather up the leaves and see the glowing heart. Her breast

rose and fell with the exercise she had taken, and seemed to accentuate her figure. He noticed the sloping shoulders and the full round of her hips before he reached her moist flushed face, and saw her start to recognise him. Was it this that whetted his appetite or the rose beauty of her skin? He suspected that she was thinking of another man—perhaps even the Master with whom she had ridden—this woman who started to see her own husband, and a devil of envy of any man she favoured possessed him.

“Lily!” he said violently.

“Ainslie?” she returned, half hesitating. Then her figure straightened, she drew herself up with maddening curves of bust and hip and looked at him half mockingly, half indignantly. “You have followed me here?”

“I wished to speak to you——” he said lamely.

She raised her brows, even as she proceeded leisurely down the gallery. “Surely that is possible at home! You have the whole day.”

He started in pursuit, hardly conscious of a certain ludicrous effect in thus following at her jaunty heels, for she swung the tail of her habit with significant effect, as who should say “A dozen men—or dogs!—if you will. But I hold them properly in tow.”

It was so new a mental as well as a physical attitude for her that he was nonplussed, and found himself almost stammering. “I wish to speak to you—we must have this out at once. I do not like it!”

“You do not like it!” She did not turn her face, but he knew the raised brows while his own eyes savagely noted the little soft rings of hair at her neck above the white stock.

“You have been riding with Chateris—or Vane-Hurst—this morning!” he said with sudden inspiration.

"I hear that one or the other is always with you. There will be talk attached to our name——"

"There has always been talk attached to our name," she returned amusedly. "It was none of my getting in the first instance."

"Is this your revenge?"

"Revenge!" She turned at last, at the very dressing-room door, and faced him with the dawn of some new feeling in her awakened eyes. "Oh no—it is nothing to do with you. It is I, myself. I have only just discovered living."

He bit his lip in reality now, gnawed it between strong white teeth in his virile anger. "I suppose this is my just desert for having—for having—let you alone." He softened desertion to a vague liberty.

Then he was surprised by a ringing laugh. She was looking at him now, with wide conscious eyes and a cruel amusement. For suddenly he seemed to her a small man, small in every way, with a blatant conceit that warped even his sense of justice. Was it possible that she had ever fretted over his indifference? She had planned to draw him back by the very means that had almost become the end itself to her—as Jewel had warned her it might. And now—now he stood before her baffled, offering her silently something which only repelled her. Ah! it was not this that she had meant to regain! . . .

"My good Ainslie," she said slowly, "you have often advised me to be more like other women, to find amusement for myself—you have even hinted that I might harmlessly attract men. I took as a model the woman you admired, and went to school to her—never mind how. If I have been successful she should be proud of her pupil, and you should hardly blame me."

His face flushed to furious red, and he made a menacing

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step forward. The laughing, alluring face drove the man in him a degree further towards the beast. He felt he could have seized her as his lawful prey and carried her off by force, and indeed his movement did drive her back a pace into the entrance of the dressing-room, he following.

"You are my wife," he said, "whatever you may be to other men, tyrant or goddess. My wife, and I have rights in you!"

The expression in her eyes changed to startled anger. She glanced back and saw whither they were going—the privacy of the room behind her, a distant reflection of the bedchamber from which he had voluntarily banished himself these two years. The flush on his face was too ardent for her security. She summoned her courage and sprang back for safety.

"Forfeited!" she said distinctly, and shut the door in his face. He heard it bolted upon thwarted instincts, and stood as if uncertain how to act, his teeth still pressed upon his lower lip. From the other side of the door came the sound of a woman's voice humming a waltz tune, lightly and indifferently—"Quand l'Amour meurt!"

He drew back as if she had struck him, and the mask of restraint fell upon his face again. Undoubtedly he had himself well in hand, for it was with his usual coolness that he crossed the gallery and went down the stairs into the uninteresting street. The man in the office looked out again as he passed and asked him if he had seen the lady, and could they do anything more for him? Nothing, thanks, unless one of their men would call him a cab. They were instant in service, and with only a few seconds to wait he was rolling away northward, smoking a cigarette, and as unreadable as the Sphinx to anyone at the Riding School.

He drove straight to Jewel Errington's house in Mayfair. It was some time since he had been there, for the rupture between them had never been mended, though it was simply tacit. He told himself savagely that his wife had driven him to this. It was her fault that he sought a mistress whom he had virtuously intended to discard—through mutual weariness. As Ainslie drew up at the familiar door, and dismissed the cab, he felt that he was as decent a husband as any in London who is driven into evil courses by a heartless wife.

The door was opened by the butler, who stood filling up the entrance with polite inquiry as to the demands of a visitor. He did not as heretofore move to one side with deferential invitation to enter, and Ainslie perforce paused upon the doorstep. From behind the butler came the scent of kuss-kuss lightly borne to his nostrils, the dim outlines of the well-known hall seemed like a half-remembered dream, and as he stood there the faint whisper of a woman's skirts were distinctly audible, and voices in conversation, but the words were lost.

"Mrs Errington is not at home," said the servant quietly.

Ainslie took out a pocket-book and found a visiting card. There was no more expression on his face than there had been at the Riding School. He drew out a pencil and wrote "p.p.c." in the corner.

"Give that to Mrs Errington, Collins," he said carelessly, and heard the door close behind him as he turned into the silent, respectable street.

CHAPTER X

"She looked so lovely as she swayed
The rein with dainty finger tips
A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth, for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon those perfect lips."

LORD TENNYSON.

THE morning on which Mrs Errington took her lesson in learning to ride like an Englishwoman was a downpour of rain. The season had been exceptionally fine, but a protracted effort at fine weather is invariably too much for England. She breaks down and bursts into tears. The rain thundered on the glass skylight of the Riding School, and ran down the dull street outside in a temporary torrent. It drove into Jewel's face as she left her brougham, and even in the little interval between the shelter of the vehicle and that of the dark doorway it wetted the fine cloth of her habit and lay in namesake gems on her wavy dark hair, and the lashes that hid her inscrutable eyes. She wore no hat, for the day was a hot one though wet, but she was almost immaculate in the severity of her habit. She would have been quite so, according to British canons, but for the fact that the cloth clung a little too tightly, and the cut of the whole costume somehow suggested the circus again rather than the hunting field. There was nothing to be guessed from the pure pale skin or the lowered lids; but a little pulse in her throat beat visibly if there had been anyone to notice, and the line of her nostrils

was thin and drawn as that of a thoroughbred before racing.

It would be interesting to know the emotions or even the expectation of the Riding Master over this lesson. But he was a young man who locked his mental experiences, if he had any, behind his earnest mouth. Perhaps, being pre-eminently a hard worker, without such things as nerves, he was too prosaic to attach more interest to one pupil than another, save as raw material for his skill.

Mrs Errington did not go into the gallery. She walked straight into the School, where her horse was awaiting her on the tan, for the grooms had been promptly called as soon as her carriage appeared. The Riding Master was himself in waiting, pulling on his gloves and looking as if he had but just stepped out of his dressing-room rather than having been at work since seven that morning. He stood squarely upon his feet, his broad shoulders flung back and his muscles braced as if he were in the saddle. Mrs Errington glanced at him as he raised his hat, and then at the grey she was to ride. The horse was a handsome hack and stood motionless to the groom's hand, his hind-feet a trifle out, as if he were accustomed to the show ring, and his neck arched. There was a little comic likeness perhaps between the two attitudes of the Master and the horse, for a sudden radiant smile broke the grave set of Mrs Errington's lips, hovered on them for a moment like a butterfly on a scarlet flower, and passed into the sunshine of memory. She took the rein carelessly, rested her foot in the groom's hand, and prepared to spring.

"One moment, madam."

The lesson was begun already, and the Riding Master stepped forward to her side. She stood motionless with

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downcast lids, a white-faced statue of a woman, while he spoke.

"Take up your reins properly, please, so that you may have control of the horse as soon as you are up. If he did anything wrong as they are now you would be powerless."

Mrs Errington looked at the reins as if a little doubtful as to his exact meaning. The Riding Master took them from her and deliberately placed them between her fingers. She yielded her hand as simply as a child.

"Now, Blackleigh!" said the Riding Master briskly. A second groom came forward and placed his hand for Mrs Errington's foot, but light and active as she looked it seemed that she was unused to being mounted in that way, for she broke through the foot-rest. "I am so sorry!" she said courteously to the groom, and prepared to do it again. But the second essay was no better than the first. Her foot slipped, and the groom seemed to be the more chagrined of the two. The Riding Master put the man firmly on one side.

"Look here, madam, put your foot into my hand—so!" he said, taking a firm hold of the arched instep. Jewel's feet were far more faultless than her face from every standard of beauty. "Now when I say three straighten your knee and lift yourself rather than spring. You are not used to mounting from the ground?"

She did not answer save by a slight shrug of her shoulders, but waited still, her foot resting in the palm of his hand while he gave the stereotyped "One—two—three!" He hardly needed to make the effort he expected however, for she went up like a feather. The Riding Master made no comment.

As the groom standing at the grey's head led him off round the School, according to immemorial custom for a

new pupil, the corners of Mrs Errington's mouth moved a little. They twitched with something less than a noiseless laugh, and her lids flickered. But she sat stiffly in the saddle as she had been placed, the reins held carefully in her hands, and had not moved her position when the Riding Master joined her on his powerful bay, and the men withdrew. Then she lifted innocent lids and looked at him.

"Is this right?" she said. "I feel so odd!"

"You do not look very comfortable. Let yourself go more—there is no give and take between you and the horse, that's why he is fretting."

"I am not accustomed to using a curb," said Mrs Errington with admirable meekness.

"I want you to get used to it. It is necessary with some horses, particularly if you want a quick control." (He thought of a horse with this very lady on his back, dashing along the Row as he had often seen them, and in his opinion unable to check their mad pace within many yards.) "But there is no need to be stiff!" he added pointedly.

"But all the English are stiff!"

He met the provocative glance with his steady grey eyes, and seemed for a moment to take in the whole of her face and figure with some inward-arriving at a conclusion. But all he said was: "I am afraid you got wet this morning, madam?" and his eyes rested longest on the glistening dark hair with the smouldering lights in it bound round and round her head.

She raised her right hand with the whip in it to her head as if to feel the drops, but the grey horse caught the shadow and the motion of the upraised arm above him and with a plunge and a kick broke into a wild rush round the School. In an instant she was one with the horse,

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her body seeming so part of his movements that it would have been impossible to dislodge her from the saddle. But she did not check him with curb or snaffle, and seemed to enjoy his fury in the confined space at his disposal.

"Pull him up!" the Riding Master called across the School in the tone of an order not to be disobeyed.

Even on the words it seemed horse and rider were standing like a statue, only the rolling eyes and the flattened ears of the grey betraying his desire for wickedness. The Riding Master pushed his horse across the School and turned again at her side. "Ride on!" he said briefly, and when she had done so, "Look here, madam," he said earnestly, "you must think for other people as well as yourself when you are riding. Their safety is as precious as yours. Suppose your horse tried to break away with you like that in the Park, for instance, and you let him race with you amongst other riders, he would upset their horses and you might cause an accident."

She looked at him under her long lashes with her mutinous, alluring eyes, and her voice had the teasing tone one might use to a child.

"That would amuse me very much! To see all those solemn people's dignity upset, and their horses doing as they liked with them. There is not one woman in the Park who could sit a runaway for long, I think!"

"We don't ride horses to run away in England," said the Riding Master coolly. "We are taught to control them."

"Then there could be no accident!"

"There must always be a certain amount of incompetence, and those who are learning, amongst riders."

"Then they should stay at home, or in your School, until they are safe. People who cannot keep on a horse's back have no right there."

She laughed outright suddenly, a pretty gurgling laugh that showed her small teeth and the tip of a red tongue. There was no doubt about the mockery in her voice now, and the Riding Master felt his authority being set at naught, played with like a shuttlecock, even used as a passing amusement perhaps. He was a young man who had himself well in hand, but it is impossible that he had not a temper.

"If I am to teach you to ride like an Englishwoman, you must please do as you are told—during the lesson," he said with a suddenness that evidently took his pupil by surprise. A little flush came up over her pale skin, and her eyes brightened. That betraying pulse in her throat began to beat again, too. "Put your hand up to your hair again," he said firmly, "and this time control your horse if he attempts to bolt."

Mrs Errington laughed again, as if in some strange way she were beginning to enjoy herself. She flung up her hand with a flourish of the whip which had, naturally, the same result upon the grey. But his maddened plunge was only momentary, she had him in hand in an instant, so tightly reined indeed that she pulled him back upon his haunches, and he attempted to rear.

"Drop your hands! Drop them on his neck!" shouted the Riding Master, and even as she obeyed him he caught the laughing glance from her eyes that told him how little she had to fear. For a minute he looked as if he would have liked to box her ears even more than Lady Sweetie's.

"You see he does not like it!" she said with aggravating quietness, as her horse once more resumed his normal position and stood quivering, ready to break out into ill-temper again at the first goad from his rider.

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The Riding Master unexpectedly dismounted from his own bay and flung the reins over his head.

"We will change saddles," he said cheerfully. "I think you are a little overweighted with that horse."

For a second her self-possession was gone. Amazement and incredulity looked out of her large eyes as if this flank movement had found her quite unprepared. The Riding Master walked up to her side and held out one hand to assist her to dismount as if she had been a nervous beginner or a small child, while with the other hand he held the grey horse firmly. Mrs Errington hesitated, looking down into his relentless face with a curious series of expressions flitting over her own, for it seemed that indignation gave way to amusement and amusement to admiration, and then with an impulsive movement she bent down towards him, her face altered with some unnamed emotion.

"I will be good now, really!" she said below her breath. "Do let me stay here—I know I have behaved abominably. But you—aggravate me so!"

He looked back at her quite as steadily, and without one trace of yielding.

"It will be better to change saddles, madam!"

Again wondering incredulity crossed her face, as if she could not recognise her failure. Then the slow smile came to her lips again, and she breathed quickly as if it were a new sensation to be so mastered.

"Then you will not let me do as I want?" she said, with a little low note of triumph in the dangerous voice.

He did not answer save by taking her foot from the stirrup iron and putting his strong hand under her elbow. At the same moment as she touched the ground he had turned and shouted over his shoulder for Black-

leigh, and as the man came in told him to change the saddles.

"Put the lady's on Retreat—she cannot manage Seamew," he said, and the malice of the speech seemed to amuse Mrs Errington, for she laughed outright.

"He makes me nervous—see how I shake!" she said audaciously, holding out a perfectly motionless hand to the Riding Master.

"I thought the grey were a bit restive," said the unconscious groom, as he tugged at the straps. "We put a curb on him for the lady, Mr Lance, and 'e don't like the curb!" he added to Mrs Errington, who laughed again with a swift glance of triumph at "Mr Lance."

"But no doubt it was necessary for my safety to have the curb!" she said demurely. "He might have run away with me, and I could not have pulled him up!" and she glanced expressively round the secure boundaries of the School walls.

The Riding Master made no comment.

He saw his own saddle adjusted to the grey Seamew, and stood a minute to give Blackleigh some instructions he had forgotten, before he mounted. By the time he joined Mrs Errington she was sauntering round the School again on the quieter bay, apparently lost in her own reflections for she rode with what the Riding Master considered culpable carelessness, her reins held loosely in one hand, and the other resting on her hip in a fashion certainly never seen in another rider in the Park. Perhaps the Riding Master had been "aggravated," as well as aggravating the lady; perhaps, as Miss Dulcie once averred, power went to his head more than any stimulant. He rode up to his pupil with fiery eyes.

"Now who told you to hold your reins like that?" he demanded. "I'm sure I didn't!"

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Mrs Errington started, and pulled herself and her horse together. There was the same look of suppressed excitement on her face as she glanced at him.

"We will try a trot," said the Riding Master grimly, and wheeled into the centre of the School to watch the exercise. Mrs Errington obediently trotted round the furthest extent of the walls, but after the second round she drew rein and joined him in the middle of the tan.

"It's awfully dull!" she remarked coolly. "Can't you come and trot too? I think the horse would go better."

"You were not using your iron," said the Riding Master, without taking the least notice of her suggestion.

"Wasn't I? I haven't much use for it. I often ride without."

"It is quite right to learn to do without it, but I want you to use it for many reasons. Try again."

"Do you know, I think you need riding on the curb much more than your horses," said Mrs Errington. "What a bully you are, ordering a poor defenceless woman about like that!"

Now it was the Riding Master's turn to look aghast, and his face withdrew all expression save a decent reserve. No one had ever questioned his authority like this, or told him of his failings in a like personal tone.

"I am thorry, madam," he said with cold resentment, but the little lisp betrayed him. "I am afraid that in teaching one forgeth to be polite. When it is a question of a pupil's thafety, for instance, one cannot wait to thay 'pleathe,' or 'will you.'"

She bit her lip as if annoyed with herself for a false step, and turning without a word began to trot again.

This time she rode with her iron, nor could he find much fault with her save slight negligences which had grown upon her with her own certainty of skill. For the next half-hour she was a docile pupil, bearing with patience the monotony of doing what she was told, trotting, cantering, handling her horse to order, and when at last he told her she had better rest, and began to pace slowly round the School with her again, the meekness was still in her manner to a surprising extent.

"I am afraid I have fallen into a good many bad habits—but I had no one to look after me, you see," she said wistfully. "I was taught to ride in Chili by being thrown on to the back of a pony and left to cling to him as best I might. My boy is much better off in having you to teach him from the first."

"And to bully him?" said the Riding Master after a second's hesitation.

She flashed round at him with eyes that were suspiciously bright. "Ah, it is so good for us!—don't think I underrate it. Only—no other man has treated me—like that." The Riding Master was looking straight between his horse's ears, so it is possible he was not conscious of the speaking face or the little quick motion of her hand towards him. It is also quite possible that had he seen it he would have warned her not to drop her reins. "Did you resent being told that you were a bully?" she said gently, and though bully is not a caressing term it sounded a subtle compliment in the pretty low voice.

"No, madam. You were quite right to remind me. I owe you an apology."

"I don't want an apology," she said pettishly, sitting straight in her saddle. "It is something new to find an Englishman who does not treat you with such severe

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respect that you might be a graven image rather than a thing of flesh and blood ! ” The fierce tone changed to a little sad laugh, and she coloured beautifully. “ A new phase of my bad habits, you see ! I am not stiff enough, either mentally or physically. ”

“ It is very easy to get into a bad habit, and very difficult to get out of it, ” said the Riding Master drily. (But he didn't know that he was dry.) “ When I am hunting, madam, I throw my head up—like this. ” The well-cut chin went up with a jerk, and the head back, with a corresponding motion of his shoulders. “ That's wrong, of course, but it came from my riding big horses when I was a little chap, and having to hold them with my whole strength. It took my head back as well as my arms. ”

Had he been easily flattered he might have been by the interest that immediately brightened her face at the hint of personal reminiscence ; but her impulsive “ Tell me more about yourself—you rode when you were quite a boy ? ” had the effect of closing his confidences. He replied politely and quite simply, “ Yes, madam, I have ridden since I was a child. I taught two lads older than myself by the time I was sixteen, ” but he offered no further information, and before she could demand it one of the grooms came into the School to speak to him, and he glanced at the clock.

“ The time is nearly up. Will you canter round the School for the last, madam, and allow me to see how you sit now ? ”

The rather elaborate tone of the request was so unlike his former earnest orders that she seemed piqued and flashed a reproach at him. And perhaps her contrary spirit urged her to attend to no regulations this time, in consequence, for she threw aside all memory of the Riding

Master's teachings, and rode as no Englishwoman rides, with the splendid abandonment of the savage. But ah! the beauty of it! The glory of the mere motion! Even within the limits of the School her pose suggested the stretch of a wild world that had no boundaries for safety. And the bay horse seemed to catch the infection and to bear her onward in a mutual rush for free air and lawless pleasure. The day had lightened, and with the ceasing of the rain patter on the roof a gleam of wet sunshine had broken downwards to fall upon her dark uncovered head and passionate face. For all her emotions seemed to have struggled loose, and to be swaying her light pliable body with every forward plunge of the powerful horse. She rode with the reins in her left hand only, and her right on her hip in that unconventional attitude that the Riding Master had already condemned. It freed the outline of her breast and the audacious folds of the clinging habit as she swept by, the stirrup swinging clear of her foot—a maddening vision of beauty, breathing warm life and throbbing with quick senses . . . while the Riding Master sat quietly in the centre of the School, turning his horse to watch her, his face free of any feeling save a slight gravity.

The horse's pace had changed from a canter to a gallop when the Master called to her to stop. She checked the animal as easily as she had done the grey when she chose to exert herself, and joined him in the centre of the School, the excitement of the motion still in her face. She was indeed instinct with triumph and grace, and the eyes she raised to his had the innocence of a child asking praise, coupled with the subtlety of a woman who demands all that a man may give. He met the look without a change in his gravity.

"That time you did absolutely nothing that I told

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you," he said. "You went back into all the old faults which I corrected for you. You must try to remember, if the lesson is to be of any use to you."

That was all the homage he offered to her conscious parade of a skill and mastery far beyond his teaching! This was her reward for flinging her beauty and courage to him as a gage! Her face altered from its reckless look of pleasure to that of a maddened creature, outraged by control.

Jewel's view of existence was a material one. If she wanted the good things of the world she had only had to barter a physical favour in exchange, were it but a kiss from her warm lips. Seeing that the Tree of Knowledge grew goodly fruit, and was to be desired, she had made fair bargains to the best of her ability. To be thwarted was an experience that drove her into a cold rage. She looked at the Riding Master anew, with insolent indifference.

"I don't think I shall continue the lessons—they are no good to me," she said curtly.

"Very well, madam."

He dismounted promptly and offered her his hand, which with the brusqueness of a spoilt child she brushed aside, and seizing the pommel threw herself carelessly out of the saddle. In spite of her rebuff he made an instinctive movement to save her.

"You should be careful in dismounting, madam," he said seriously. "If the horse had moved then you would have been thrown on your face."

Quite unexpectedly she turned upon him in a fury equal to Lady Sweetie's, her eyes wide open with anger, her little hands clenched as if they would have liked to tear his quiet independence from him.

"I am sick of your cautions!" she said, panting.

" You can't live—you can't breathe, naturally, you English—you wear moral corsets to stiffen your minds, and physical ones to stiffen your bodies ! Life is worth nothing to you, for you never risk one splendid chance ! I hate everything that can be called English—it is another word for something forbidden ! "

She made a strange expressive gesture with her hands as if she thrust away a barrier, she turned her beautiful, broken face and too womanly figure, and rushed out of the School in a manner that was certainly not of the race she hated.

And the Riding Master made no comment.

CHAPTER XI

" My mistress bent that brow of hers,
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing while or two
With life or death in the balance—Right !
The blood replenished me again :
My last thought was at least not vain.
I and my mistress, side by side,
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So one day more am I deified.

Who knows but the world may end to-night ? "

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE position of a relentless father has always struck me as a peculiarly thankless one. Nobody sympathises with the poor man's very practical desire that his daughter should be fed and clothed as she has been accustomed, and the improvident lovers are the only ones of the group to cut picturesque figures. Colonel Vane-Hurst was ruefully experiencing the part of spoiler in Love's young dream, and being by nature a kindly soul, and devoutly thankful to let well alone in other people's lives, he was proportionally discomfited. He did not quite know himself how he came to assume such an unpopular pose, and to insist firmly that this nonsense with young Digby Errington should come to an end, for he had spoilt Miss Dulcie consistently from her bayhood with considerable assistance from his grown-up son. Neither of the men was perhaps the best mentor to bring up a high-spirited, impulsive girl-child, for their long stretches of indulgence were apt to alternate with phases

of military discipline more suited to a boy, with the result that Miss Dulcie resembled at times an over-bitted thoroughbred fretting against the unusual curb and the heavy hand of sudden authority. The girl missed her mother unconsciously, the while she staunchly asserted that no bosom friend of her experience had such a good time as she, or was so well thought for and guarded. Men are good guardians, it is true, but women are the better guides. When Colonel Vane-Hurst became stricken with a sense of responsibility to his motherless daughter, and set forth the fiat with regard to Sir Digby, Miss Dulcie was taken by complete surprise, and suffered a sense of injury in that her father had plunged at once into his attitude of stern parent, without giving her the least reason to expect it.

It was perhaps Lord Malbrook who was innocently at the root of the matter. For he chanced to meet the Colonel when his own parental conscience was disturbed by an assurance from Lady Sweetie, in a drawing-room full of guests, that when she grew up she meant to marry the butcher's boy, and had already kissed him through the area railings with views to that end. This pleasing announcement was met by the family with cold indifference ; but in his heart Lord Malbrook could not help cogitating on the extreme unpleasantness that would ensue if Sweetie's determination should outlast the nursery.

"Deuced nuisance having daughters," he confided to the Colonel, burying his hands in his beard and apparently deriving much comfort from the mechanical tugs he gave it. "You can steer a boy through the lower ranks of chorus girls, unless he's a born pig ; but a girl can make a hash of things, from the schoolroom, long before she's out !"

"'Deed yes!" said the Colonel vaguely, and it began to dawn on him that there had been a lot of boy-and-girl nonsense between Dulcie and Digby Errington before he paid the bill for a presentation frock. "Great mistake—a woman can't know her own mind till she's seen something of her world."

"Half the *mésalliances* are made in short frocks!" said Lord Malbrook gloomily.

"No girl who's faced her first season with a clear mind wants to marry a pauper!"

"The deuce is in it to start 'em clear, though!"

"It only wants a little firmness from the first—that's it, a little firmness!" said the Colonel, and he really thought he had found the solution to the problem.

"Firmness is all very well, dear boy, but two can play at that game, and a girl's a good deal firmer than her father when she's made up her mind to social suicide!" And Lord Malbrook went away, tugging his beard, and left Colonel Vane-Hurst to his new attribute of firmness.

He really meant to be fair, and to insist only on firmness. But the "little firmness" became a ferocious despotism the minute he began to lay down the law, or so it seemed from Miss Dulcie's point of view. He had the misfortune to approach both the young people on the subject together, and his plain and reasonable statement of the facts made Sir Digby wince with his own ineligibility, and Miss Dulcie to turn very white and feel as if parental homicide were sometimes excusable.

"But, sir, you have never raised this objection before!" Errington protested in a low voice. "I understood of course that you did not wish any engagement announced between Dulcie and myself, but I hoped that, in a few years, when my prospects are better, that I might come forward openly——"

"My dear Errington, I did not rightly know what your prospects were at the time of your cousin's marriage coming to light," said the Colonel impatiently. He felt that he was being forced back upon his own position, so to speak, and his professional instinct warned him to stand now or lose his big guns. "I thought you had a private income——"

"I have, sir."

"A private income sufficient to keep a wife—not only to keep your name on the clubs." (There was a distinct likeness at the moment between the Colonel and Major Teddy in his "riding-off" tactics.) "I find that you are certainly not possessed of the means I supposed, and you are without any profession or source of income."

"I am hoping to get into Lloyd's, sir," said the young man quietly. "My intention is to become an underwriter. Of course that involves a certain investment of capital, but it gives me the chance to increase the income that you recommend."

"Humph!" said the Colonel with obvious disapproval. He was of the old-fashioned type which thinks that there are only four professions open to gentlemen, and the idea of Lloyd's did not appeal to him. "You failed to pass for the Guards, didn't you?" he said, a trifle brutally. Young Errington, when regarded as his cousin's heir, had been sent to Sandhurst with the army in view, and had failed to pass his exam.

"Fortunately for me, sir," said Sir Digby drily. "I should have half-learnt a profession by the time I had to sell out."

"You would have been learning something at any rate," said the Colonel bluntly. "Anyhow your prospects are not good enough to warrant my sanctioning your having any understanding with my daughter. I

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am very sorry, Errington—it's not as if I had any objection to you personally—but you can see for yourself——”

“ Yes, I quite understand.” Sir Digby had gone from white to red, but his voice was quite steady. “ You wish me to discontinue my visits here ? ”

“ It would be advisable——” It is difficult to dismiss a man from your own house when he has had the *entrée* there since his schooldays.

“ I am entering no protest, sir,” said the young man, throwing back his shoulders with an effort, and drawing a big breath as if he got a weight off his chest. “ But I wish you to understand that I shall take my final answer from Dulcie, and from her only. It will not be for years, in all probability, that I can even afford to marry, and I shall not try to persuade her to an engagement until I can. But if I prosper, it will be with the end in view of making her my wife, and I shall marry her then with or without your consent so long as I have hers. I am not going to ask her to wait for me, even—we can risk that for we know each other—I am going to say good-bye.”

All this time Miss Dulcie had not spoken, a fact sufficiently significant if her father had known anything of feminine human nature. He was frowning quite openly at the idea of his daughter marrying an underwriter at Lloyd's, however successful, and was quite prepared to combat any attack on her part. He expected protest, if not flat rebellion. But none came. Instead the lovers looked at each other across the room, a long steady look that excluded the Colonel and made him feel suddenly immaterial. It was as if he did not exist in their universe, for all his interference in their lives, and their next action caused him to add insignificance to his unimportance. For Sir Digby held out his arms and the girl was in them,

it seemed with one simultaneous gravitation of their two bodies to each other. They kissed without the faintest trace of embarrassment or consciousness of an audience, and the long, close embrace was only terminated with the man opening the door for the girl, who passed out of the room without once turning her eyes on her father. Sir Digby stood with the door handle in his hand until the sound of her light feet running upstairs died away in the ears of both men. Then he turned and said, "Good-bye, Colonel," without any betrayal in his face or manner, and walked out of the house. The front door shutting behind him came back quite as distinctly as Miss Dulcie's flying feet to the smoking-room, where the uncomfortable interview had taken place.

"Well, I'm damned!" said Colonel Vane-Hurst.

He rather wished he had drawn Teddy into the discussion and had not felt so sure that he was quite capable of managing the situation by himself. But Teddy was seldom at hand unless specially detained for service, and his father felt irritably that he was a broken reed in an emergency like the present. He would not acknowledge it, but in his heart he had a suspicion that the Major had a more weighty influence with his half-sister than her father, and that he would have brought matters to a less disturbing issue. For the life of him Colonel Vane-Hurst could not exactly tell how the two young people had taken it, their astonishing proceedings being out of all tradition and no clue to their ultimate intentions.

Miss Dulcie had retired upstairs to the fortress of her own room, from which she emerged in due course without any reference in her face or manner to the scene in the smoking-room. The Sphinx was not more feminine than Miss Dulcie in her attitude of aloofness and until she chooses to speak the historian is silent.

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Sir Digby went out from the house of Vane-Hurst, and closed the door on his visiting days there, without however shaking the dust from his feet. He was quite as unmoved as he had been before the Colonel, but in his heart he was very angry. That did not hurt him, but when it passed it left him depressed, and that was far worse. His mood, by the time he reached the Park (the Vane-Hursts lived in Curzon Street), was little short of despair, and he was feeling that it would be a relief to chuck England, with all its beastly restrictions, and try his luck in the Colonies. A man with a little capital had a chance there, and he recognised without confirmation that even though he were making a good income he would find a barrier in the way of his marrying Dulcie in Colonel Vane-Hurst's old-fashioned pride. Had he been a curate working towards a modest rectory he would have had a better chance, or the most briefless of barristers eking out a livelihood by journalism, while the services would have been a highroad to favour. But the honesty of his endeavour in the commercial world did not appeal to the Colonel. It seemed a very hopeless task that he had set himself, to Sir Digby, as he walked gloomily toward the Marble Arch looking at the ground and taking no heed of his direction. The long monotonous years stretched ahead of him, packed with work, and he struggled with a young man's natural inclination to enjoy himself, and hampered still more by the traditions of the class to which he belonged. He did not doubt Dulcie, bless her ! but he began to doubt himself, which is the worst of all roads to failure.

At the Marble Arch he turned mechanically from the noise of the traffic, and began to walk along the galloping ground on the further side of the rails, as he wanted to think. And half-way along the ride a big brown dog

dashed noisily over the grass and on to the tan, barking and jumping at a lady who was coming along at the gallop. It was simply a bad habit of the dog's that his owners probably checked when with him ; but he had left his owners at home, in one of those big houses in Hyde Park Place, and had come out on his own evil pursuits. The result threatened disaster to both dog and rider, for the wild black horse the lady rode plunged furiously and kicked out with vicious hoofs, catching the dog in the ribs and causing him to utter a yelp of pain. He was not much hurt, for he was returning to the attack when the lady pulled up her maddened horse with a master hand, and leaning down began to pat and soothe him. The minute he stood still the dog made off across the grass contentedly, limping a little but satisfied that he had accomplished his intentions. He was probably a policeman in a former life, for he never interfered with riders at a walking pace—it was the gallop which had excited him. But the black horse was tossing the foam from his angry lips, and rolling bloodshot eyes even while the lady soothed him. Sir Digby mechanically ducked under the railings and went up to the rider to see if he could be of any assistance, and even as he did so the little riding whip slipped from her hand and fell at his feet. It was a mere toy, a slight thing that she could only have used to guide or indicate her purpose to her horse, and on the ivory handle there was a name in little gold letters—"Jewel." He hardly glanced at it as he handed it back, for his mind was still half divided between the stress of the moment and his own trouble.

"Thank you so much !" she said in a curiously pretty voice. It soothed him even in his self-absorption, and made him hope that she would speak again. "Will you hold it a moment ?" she said, smiling. "Just while I

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feel if my hat is straight ? Negrito plunged so suddenly that it was like a jerk."

He stood at her knee, watching her, while she put her hand swiftly to her hair and touched the elastic ; but he could not see that the hat had moved an inch. Then she patted the horse's neck again, and spoke to him in softest Spanish that sounded even prettier than her English. At last she turned and took the whip.

As she did so she bent a trifle from the saddle and looked into the young man's eyes. There was a touch of weariness and discontent upon her face that seemed almost like the reflection of his, and he wondered vaguely what toy on which she had set her heart Fate had denied her.

" I think you must be Sir Digby Errington," she said quietly. " I have seen you several times, though we have never met."

The young man's plain face flushed a little with surprise. He did not really recognise her at the moment, so far had she been from his thoughts, but her face was certainly familiar in the vague way that well-known people's are, and he might have known her by repute or seen her in the illustrated papers, or had her pointed out to him by other acquaintances. In his abstraction he was really at sea, and hunted vainly for the name that eluded him as allied to her unmistakable individuality.

" You have the advantage of me ! " he said courteously.

" I think I have," she returned with a gleam of sauciness in her eyes, that faded again in a minute to the former weariness. " I am Mrs Errington, your cousin Gerald's wife," she said in the same collected tone. " Will you come and see me ? It seems absurd that we should be enemies, or at least that the world should think so."

A few hours ago Sir Digby would have excused himself from the invitation, or if courtesy forbade so much would have accepted and never gone—the methods of the man who said, “I go, sir,” and went not, being the perfect example for a social difficulty. He had never called on Mrs Errington with the rest of the family, not solely because he bore a grudge against her for having deprived him of his inheritance, for it seemed to him only scant justice that his cousin should treat her decently after death, not having appeared to do so in life ; but the widow’s reputation had been against her in Sir Digby’s eyes, contrary to the majority of his male acquaintance. He knew and was sorry for Lily Devereux, and it was a very few weeks after Jewel’s appearance in England that Ainslie had met her and the first and most notorious of her conquests had begun. Sir Digby was a little disgusted with the widow, and very much with Ainslie Devereux. He had never called in Little Mayfair Street.

Now, however, the unexpected invitation caught him in a new mood, and found him vulnerable. There was a suggestion of recklessness in the flinging his principles to the wind and going to see Mrs Errington that attracted him. After all, poor little woman, what had she done that he should sit in judgment on her and be the one to stand aloof? Played the fool perhaps ; no worse. And he, who for very generosity should have been the first to acknowledge her and claim kinship, had posed as a vindictive prig ! As she said, it was a pity for the world to think them enemies. He was glad she had asked him to visit her—it would be something of a distraction from his trouble to go to her house, though it might be only a momentary relief.

“Thank you,” he said simply. “I should like to come.”

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"I shall be in this afternoon," said Jewel, who knew the value of Now and Here. "Will that suit you? You know where I live?"

Half London knew that, and Sir Digby could not plead ignorance. He assented and raised his hat, while the lady cantered on with a touch of her light heel to her horse. His delicate equilibrium was still upset by the encounter with the dog, and she found it necessary to pat his neck and control him with her voice more than with her hands; but she did so absently, and the touch of discontent had fallen back upon her lips.

"He is very plain!" she mused, a photographic memory of the young man standing at her horse's shoulder being much clearer before her eyes than the green vista of the Park. "But he is young—and he comes next in inheritance after the child!"

Sir Digby arrived on the noted doorstep at four o'clock, and was admitted by the impassable man-servant into the Eastern hall with its vague scent of kuss-kuss. Everything was a trifle barbaric to his eyes, but he liked it—it was different to most of the houses he visited, and diverted his mind. Different too—very different—was the hostess who received him, and he felt that the barbarism reached its climax in his cousin's wife as he was ushered into her presence.

She was sitting in a low easy-chair which was piled with soft cushions, and did not attempt to rise and greet him. Indeed, her sleepy, lovely eyes barely glanced at him for a moment, and she took a cigarette from her lips and blew the smoke through her nostrils, giving him time to observe her. The room was as Eastern as the hall, a place of sombre dark tapestries and beautiful carved wood, and all the richness and colour demanded by such a background seemed concentrated about Jewel.

The silk cushions were a blaze of flame, and orange, and rose, and her pliant figure was thrown into relief by their prismatic colours as she leaned against them, her own gown being of some dull Oriental stuff patterned with gold. It was somewhat scanty, and the closeness of its folds struck the visitor as outlining her figure too definitely for the canons of good taste which had been part of his education. She had twisted the great dusky mass of her hair low down on her neck and had not ornamented it in any way, but he felt that her throat was too beautiful to be exposed, and wished that she had worn a collar—after the British manner, which finds something rather indecent in loveliness.

"How are you?" she said languidly. "You must find a seat for yourself—I am far too comfortable to move." But she shifted her supple body even as she spoke, towards the chair nearest to her, and he sat down there, feeling half excited and half repelled. He was too English to like the unconventionality of his reception, and he wished he knew her well enough to ask her not to dress like that before men—it accounted amply in his mind for the tales about her, without any more actual harm.

"I hope you weren't at all upset this morning," he said rather gravely, as he took a cigarette from the box she held out. "Your horse was very startled."

"By the dog? Oh no—I did not mind." She seemed rather amused. "It takes more than that to upset me."

"You are a splendid rider!"

"I wish my boy took after me—I am having him taught, but he is so timid. I want you to see your little cousin, and to forgive him for having taken your inheritance. I think you will when you realise what a poor little

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interloper he is ! Ring that bell, will you ? *Transito shall bring him.*"

Sir Digby sat silent and rather nonplussed during the interval before the summons was answered. He did not like to look too obviously at Mrs Errington because she was quite obviously intended to be looked at, and she did not trouble to speak to him. It seemed as if she offered the insolence of her beauty in lieu of conversation, and the mere fact suggested impropriety. There is nothing so unconventional as silence between two people of opposite sexes who are not lovers.

Errington was becoming actually uncomfortable when a dark coloured woman entered the room, leading a small fair-haired boy by the hand as though he were a baby.

"Is this my little cousin ?" said Sir Digby kindly, taking the child by his slight shoulders and looking down with a very gentle expression on his plain face. "I hope we shall be friends some day."

"He is very nervous and shy," said Mrs Errington a trifle hastily. "Sydney ! shake hands with Sir Digby." There was a note of warning in her voice which the boy obeyed. But his scared blue eyes were fixed on his mother's gold-clad figure rather than on Sir Digby.

"Is he really my cousin, mamma ?" he said in a breathless little voice, standing between his nurse and the young man.

"Yes, really."

"Then why hasn't he ever been to see me before ?"

"Ah, why ?" she laughed a little, glancing at Sir Digby with the same careless enjoyment of his discomfort. "Perhaps he was jealous of you ! He is not much to stand in your way, is he ?" she added off-handedly to her guest, with a faint disdain in her tone that he translated as regret.

"Poor little chap!" he said sympathetically. "He will grow stronger in England, I hope."

The generous wish was so honest that she looked at him a little curiously. "He is too weakly for school," she said. "He will have to have tutors."

"He is too young to be crammed at present, surely!" Sir Digby expostulated, still holding the little nervous fingers the child had left in his, "He had far better play—shall I come and play with you, Sydney?"

The boy glanced swiftly at his mother, and met her half-closed smiling eyes. It seemed that he gained some assurance from them for he turned with more certainty to Errington.

"Yes, please—I should like it very much!" he said quaintly and added, "I have no one to play with except Transito and Romar."

"Romar is his dog," Mrs Errington explained. "That is a bargain then—you will come and play with Sydney. Now take him away and give him his tea, Transito. Give me a kiss, first, Syd!"

Sir Digby found nothing to cavil at in the picture of her with her arms round the little boy, while she kissed his smooth pale cheek, and buried her face against his soft hair; but he heard her draw her breath in a curious, rather savage fashion, as the child was led away by his nurse, and wondered if her resentment were not caused by his own obvious strength and good health. The Chilian nurse had been a silent spectator throughout—so silent that the young man had almost forgotten her presence, and did not see her glance back at him as she left the room in a manner at least as threatening as her mistress's.

"It would be unfair to hate such a poor little boy, wouldn't it?" said Jewel, lifting her subtle eyes

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to Sir Digby as the door closed behind Sydney and Transito.

"I never hated him——"

"But you never came to see him. He accused you of it!"

"I will come now."

She smiled, well satisfied. She had calculated on the effect of the child's helplessness and delicacy on this chivalrous, simple-minded nature, and found Sydney for once a useful asset in her home. On a former occasion she had made a mistake with regard to him, and had never retrieved it. It was one day when her passions were not quite under control, perhaps, and two men were present. One was Major Vane-Hurst, who had never been in the house before; the other was an older acquaintance. Sydney had been brought in to assert his own passive existence, and had had a fit of trembling and tears. It had irritated her, and at last she had cuffed him, the sudden blow sending him reeling across the room before Major Teddy caught and saved him from a fall. The other man had laughed and applauded—"It would do him good to be licked into shape at school," he said. "There'd be no pity for you if you whimpered there, my boy!"—but Major Teddy had got up and walked straight out of the house after one direct, unpleasant look at his hostess. Nor had he ever walked in again. He was a big man, and a masculine man, and his very fierceness was an attribute that appealed to Jewel Errington, who ground her teeth to find that she had lost him for such a flimsy excuse. She did not mean to make the same mistake with Sir Digby.

"He'll outgrow his girlishness, I should think," he said, with an uneasy sense of having vaguely resented the boy's poor little life. "At least I hope so."

Mrs Errington lifted her chin, and gave a sudden irresistible laugh, as though he had amused her. He flushed a little with the discomfiture of her inexplicable mockery, and her face grew instantly serious.

"He is very delicate!" she said with subtle reproach.

"Poor little boy! I daresay an open-air life will do him good. Did you say he was learning to ride?"

"Yes," she said briefly, and her red lips shut one over the other as if at some rasping memory, and the discontent came back to her sombre eyes as they rested on Sir Digby's plain, honest face. "He will never make much of a horseman," she added, as if the admission were forced from her.

"Well, I daresay not from your point of view. But you are very exceptional, you know. By Jove! the way you sat that brute to-day was—was wonderful! he must need a lot of handling. He's not English bred, is he?"

"No, he's a Spanish horse—at least, he has Spanish blood. Come and see him!" she added with one of her impulsive changes, and was up and out of her chair before his slower brain had quite grasped the invitation. He followed her out of the room feeling almost bewildered, and down the dark hall where the scent of kuss-kuss still clung to every hanging curtain and thick soft rug. Jewel ran down a narrow staircase that presumably led to the servants' quarters, and turned to a glass door on the left. It opened abruptly on to a dark courtyard paved with stones and overlooked by the backs of other houses in other streets; but wedged in round the yard were small buildings which might be used either for horses or as a garage.

"I should not have taken the house if it had not had stables," she said as she ran on before, and opened

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one of the doors. "They are bad enough, but I would not keep my horses at a mews. Ugh—how dark!"

For a minute Sir Digby blinked and feared to go forward, though she felt her way fearlessly in front of him. The place was only lighted by one small window and the open door that let in some little light from the yard; but out of the darkness came the impatient rattle of a halter and the shrill neigh of a horse the moment he heard her foot. She went straight into the stall where the black horse she had ridden that morning was standing, and caressed him with a kind of fierce pleasure. Sir Digby stood just without, watching the strange picture she made in her Oriental dress, and the outlines of the dark horse who put his ears back and showed the whites of his eyes at the presence of a stranger.

"Don't come any nearer—he is not too good to those he does not know!" she warned with a laugh over her shoulder. Then followed a rapid string of Spanish, "*Eres la única criatura que me quiere!*" ("You are the only creature that cares for me") was one phrase he caught—the soft yet stately words seeming a veritable love declaration breathed into the horse's unresponsive ears—not quite unresponsive either, since he rubbed his delicate muzzle against her face and neck and hair, and pawed as horses will do for pleasure when they are fed. It gave Sir Digby a curious sensation to watch those mute caresses, a mingling of fear lest the animal's gentleness should suddenly turn to anger—he had seen women attacked and dangerously injured who had trusted high-mettled horses too far—and a furtive wonder as to what it would be like to feel the smooth cheek pressed to his own as it was against the horse's warm neck and forehead. He tingled with the excitement of her fancied touch, even

while he hated himself for it ; and his voice was not like his own as he asked her to be careful.

" Those thoroughbreds sometimes bite, though they seem so fond of you," he said, wondering what had come over him that he was so anxious to get her away. The sight of her slim hands passing over the horse's back and sides irritated him.

She laughed again, as if the very recklessness of the chance attracted her. " Perhaps ! " she said. " He has killed one man whom he did not like, and the fools of grooms here say he bites. Would you kill me, Negrito ? Strike me down with your feet, and tear me, and beat the life out ? " Her voice seemed urging him to some such fury, and Sir Digby made a step forward.

" Don't excite him any more, for heaven's sake ! " he said hoarsely.

She turned her head swiftly at the sound of his movement, and the next instant had thrust the horse round with all her force thrown against his quarters, and had sprung clear—only just in time, for he tried to wrench his head free and strike with his fore feet, but finding it impossible flung out his heels, missing her and Sir Digby by a few inches only. Jewel had thrown herself literally on Errington, and had carried both of them into safety. He staggered with the unexpected weight for an instant, got his balance, and caught her safely in his arms.

" You should not have moved—I warned you not to come nearer," she panted, leaning against his breast as the pressure of his arms constrained her. " Wait ! He will be quiet in a minute. I want to show you his beautiful proportions and to turn back the saddle-cloth."

But a new strength was on him, a frantic will-power born of the danger of the moment. Hitherto he had obeyed her in a dazed fashion, as if the unreality of her

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atmosphere half hypnotised him ; now he was suddenly assertive. He seized her arm roughly, and pushed her behind him while he shut the stable door, and then, still grasping her, he drew her back with him into the house, up the narrow stair and along the hall and into the Eastern-looking room, before he realised his own actions.

" You will not go near that dangerous brute again—at least while I am here," he said authoritatively. " I will not consent to your risking your life——"

He had led her back to the deep chair, and only released his hold on her arm when she sank down again amongst the cushions ; but he stood still over her, looking into the summer darkness of her eyes, as if their magic drew him half reluctantly to her.

" Why do you trouble over me ? If I were killed it would be one barrier out of your way at least ! " she said in her soft taunting voice.

" I don't know," he responded stupidly, and his pulses still felt oddly unsteady—perhaps with the recent scare, perhaps with some magnetism in her that half repelled while it attracted him. The eyes uplifted to his were full of a kind of speculation, as if she were somehow enjoying his mastery, even his roughness, and had hardly expected it. " You don't suppose that any man would be willing to stand by and see you killed, do you ? " he said grimly.

" It depends on the man," was her unlooked-for retort. " I have known men who were quite ready to see me killed—at moments ! "

" You had made them mad with anger then—yes, I think you could make men mad."

" With anger ? "

" With passion—blind with passion."

" Not Englishmen, at any rate."

"Why? Have you never seen an Englishman angry?"

"Only to the extent of being rude!"

He laughed shortly as if half against his will. "I am sorry we cut such sorry figures in your eyes. Perhaps if you tried you might make me so angry as to satisfy you—short of murder."

"But I don't want to make you angry—I want to be friends."

He met her eyes again, and was conscious of that unruly leap of his pulses. Yet there was nothing to cavil at in such a fair offer of truce between them. Some latent sense of danger in the whole interview pleased him in the reckless mood which had followed his rejection by Colonel Vane-Hurst. He felt excited and uneasy, yet glad of the distraction, and when he left it was he who asked if he might come again—not she who invited him. For a minute, as they stood together in the dimly lighted room, a sense that was almost horror came over him—but he thrust it aside as absurd, for what was there to fear in their very natural acquaintance?

"You are sure you want to know me?" said Mrs Errington slowly, raising her eyes to his for that inexplicable moment.

"I am——" he struggled breathlessly with the extraordinary terror assailing him. What was there that was loathsome in the proximity of himself and this woman? His hand touched her fantastic gown, and he turned hot and cold. "I am quite sure that I want to know you!" he said in a sudden strong voice.

"You won't regret it?"

"No. I am not a child to regret what I have decided upon." He remembered that he had been treated somewhat like a child by Dulcie's father, and felt the sullen anger burn in his veins.

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"Very well," she said, and it seemed as if the words came with a little sigh. "Then my house is open to you. I am not leaving town at present."

She held out her hand in careless farewell, and he took it in his own—to feel the slight fingers twine round his with the suggestive touch of a snake-charmer. His own responded as if without will-power from himself, and crushed her hand brutally before he let it go, and remembered to be ashamed. But a level temperature and sober sense did not seem to return to him until he found himself walking home along the quiet street, with the cool evening breeze blowing on his forehead. He was carrying his hat, and fancied that people who passed looked at him strangely; but it was hot weather and in quiet side streets men often bared their heads for a few minutes from their heavy conventional headgear. He passed on without caring much, his mind absorbed in the retrospect of those last few minutes in the house in Little Mayfair Street. He thought with shame that he must have acted as if intoxicated, and wondered what her impression had been.

Jewel flung herself down among the cushions, and lay still for many minutes after her visitor had left her, while her breast still rose and fell stormily, as if with an after-ache of passion, or the fret of dissatisfaction. She had not moved, and did not move when the dark-skinned maid came in to the room and walked in a slow silent fashion up to her side.

"Preciosa!" said the woman in a low voice.

"Well?" said Jewel without raising the lids from her sullen eyes.

"The child says that he is a cousin—is that true?"

"Yes, quite true. He is the heir—if Sydney were not

in his way ! ” She spoke distinctly, in Spanish, through her little teeth.

“ Then it would be wise to hold him ! ” The woman spoke warily, but in her suppressed excitement she moved nearer and plucked her mistress by the gown.

“ I am going to marry him,” said Jewel with a little yawn. “ Will that satisfy you, Transito ? It will make matters doubly sure ! ”

Transito drew a deep breath, and clapped her hands softly. “ That is good news ! ” she said, and her black eyes sparkled. “ It is all arranged—he has asked you in marriage ? ”

“ Oh no,” said Jewel, with quiet indifference. “ But he will—afterwards,” she added to herself. “ He is just the sort of boy to find that the surest bond, to think his honour involved ! ”

Transito had withdrawn. Jewel had the subtle-smelling Eastern room to herself. With a sudden gesture of superb weariness she clasped her hands behind her head and stared out into the gathering shadows where, instead of Sir Digby’s plain, well-bred face, she saw something much more elusive even to her memory—grey eyes that disregarded her, a well-cut chin, a capable strength that concerned itself only with the work in hand. Perhaps also she faced a ghost of her past life when she had been a girl, with possibilities for good in her as great as ill, before the first man who had taught her the bitterness of love had marred her world for her. Never since then till now had she been so baffled in her careless cruelties as to feel the smart in her own heart.

“ I wanted it ! ” she said fiercely to herself. “ Why couldn’t I have it ? I would burn candles to Our Lady and St Iago if they would give it to me. Oh ! I would be almost good if I could get what I want.” The memory

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picture faded out against the dusk of the draperies. She stretched her hands out with a little sob of spent passion.

"I wanted it!" she told the shadows. "Wanted! . . . wanted! . . ."

CHAPTER XII

" It was somewhere up the country, in a land of rock and scrub,
That they formed an institution called the Geebung Polo Club.
They were long and wiry natives from the rugged mountain
side,
And the horse was never saddled that the Geebungs couldn't
ride :
But their style of playing polo was irregular and rash—
They had mighty little science but a mighty lot of dash.
And, they played on mountain ponies that were muscular and
strong,
Though their coats were quite unpolished, and their manes
and tails were long.
And they used to train those ponies, wheeling cattle in the
scrub :
They were demons, were the members of the Geebung Polo
Club."

A. B. PATERSON.

FOR the space of five years there was a polo-ground at Wembly Park, where, as Vane-Hurst had said, there was more hard play to be seen than at Ranelagh or Hurlingham, and ponies were made and sticks were broken in the scientific pursuit of the game. It has now gone, I think, owing to the ground landlords not being willing to renew the lease, and the place has been devoted to aviation, while the Polo Club has been amalgamated at Kingsbury. The ground itself never was as good as those at Hurlingham or Ranelagh, being too much on a slope, and though well drained the clay soil made it very heavy in rain. But for educative purposes I would rather have gone to Wembly than to the better-known clubs, excepting Roehampton (I have heard men who ought to

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know say that George Millar is the prettiest player in England), because the Americans demonstrated to us over the cup that men who take the game seriously, and make it a profession, are bound to hit harder and gallop faster than the amateur who is merely a sportsman and regards it as his hobby. It was not altogether sacred to the professional, members of the House of Commons and the Foreign Offices playing there twice a week ; but when the club was in form spectators would learn many surprising things, and the chukkers have been known to be a bit too hot for the ordinary man. He had better stay with less earnest teams.

Wembly had another advantage, which did not, however, matter to the sportsman. It was not overrun with acquaintances. Indeed it seemed given up to horsemen, amateur and professional, and even those who claimed to be enthusiasts for the game did not all discover it. Women seldom went there unless they belonged to the district—certainly women who knew Ranelagh as well as the Park never strayed so far North. Lady Herring, who can tell you the great games for seasons past at Hurlingham, never sighted Wembly, though she was aware of Roehampton ; Lady Malbrook sat out the English-American tournament for all its disappointing days, but her experience is limited to the two best-known clubs.

It was partly for this reason that Teddy Vane-Hurst took Mrs Devereux to Wembly. As he had told her, he had been there times and often because he was a polo lover, but he had never taken his sister because she would not have met anyone she knew, and he understood in a masculine fashion that Miss Dulcie could not live by sport alone, and that some sort of human interest was essential to her. In Mrs Devereux's case he could himself

supply the human interest. This fact occurred to him slowly, as all his ideas came, and he accepted it with a certain satisfaction that remained untroubled as yet by further question. He knew also that they were most unlikely to have a soul to speak to save themselves, and that also was quite as it should be in the development of things. He had often been to Wembly for pure sport ; he went on this occasion for more subtle motives.

Mrs Devereux did not take the victoria for the excursion. She had consented to let Vane-Hurst arrange their means of locomotion, and he solved the problem by simply hailing a taxi-cab. Lily heard him ask the chauffeur if he knew where Wembly was, and laughed out in the middle of decorous Pont Street.

" Are we going to be the Children in the Wood, and will our lonely bones be discovered years hence when the builder penetrates so far into the wilderness ? " she asked mockingly.

" Well," he said, as he settled his big person into the seat beside her, " these fellows are such asses—if they don't know the way they won't ask, and they take you miles out, and their knowledge of London north is generally bounded by Regent's Park ! "

The chauffeur however did know the way, and having made up his mind to the excursion, after a moment's demur, went as direct as might be. They clung to the skirts of civilisation and familiarity, to Lily Devereux's eyes, until they had passed the Park and steered for the Edgware Road, up which they proceeded as fast as the traffic would allow them. There is much life to be seen in the Edgware Road, but it was not of the type that Lily knew. She caught herself wondering at it as they went north and still north, through small sordid streets—streets with rows of houses so terribly alike that it

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seemed impossible that the lives lived inside them could differ either. There were inevitable muslin curtains at the lower windows, and an india-rubber plant in a blue or yellow pot that seemed to stare out at passers-by, for the house doors were set flush with the pavements and forced themselves upon the street. She tried not to think of the human existences set in blue and yellow pots likewise.

"What hideous streets!" she said suddenly with a lower note in her voice, and some of the happy holiday light went out of her eyes. "What must it be like to live there!"

He turned his head quickly and looked at her. He was beginning to know the inflections of her voice. "Do you hate it so much?" he said, and his tone was a little too kind. "We shall be out in the country lanes presently."

"Yes, but—these people must go on living there!" she protested childishly. "I wonder if it seems sordid to them?"

"No, unless your life is entirely against the grain through some crookedness of Fate, you have no idea how little the environment matters. Take a man who is grinding at a profession he is unfitted for, he is infinitely more miserable, though he may be well off, than people with interests and congenial associates who are living in one of these——" He nodded in his positive fashion at the grim line of shabby doors, unbeautiful even in the afternoon sunshine. "After all, your life is lived in yourself, and not in your house," he added vaguely.

She did not answer for a moment. She was thinking of the living against the grain by some crookedness of Fate in her own experience, for she had mechanically transferred Ainslie and the blankness of her married life to the

little houses she pictured as habitations. The light shone in her eyes again, and she drew a breath as if fighting for freer air.

"And the people round you—they matter so much!" she said incoherently, following her own train of thought. "Perhaps they are happy in there, behind the muslin curtains—they may have mutual aims and ambitions, and sympathy. I was silly to think of the india-rubber plants and the pots."

"Men and women don't really want much," he said, as if he understood her by instinct. "Given two human beings who are fools enough to care for each other, the rest of the world may go hang. It's just the chance of the right halves to fit and make the whole——"

He stopped suddenly, his eyes following the lines of the grey street to its lost end, for they had turned aside into the Harrow Road, where there was less life and even shabbier aspects. It was growing more suburban—dusty trees found room to grow, and the houses—the horribly respectable houses—were villas.

"One has every encouragement here to marry, at least!" he remarked, as they passed a group of shops, where whole suites of furniture were grouped upon the pavements, and the small drapers followed suit with cheap lengths of cotton and muslin. "They seem to furnish on seven pounds ten, complete!"

"Do you think those houses are furnished inside with that sort of thing?" she queried, her dismayed eyes resting on the sticky varnish and red velvet of the chairs and sofas. "How terrible!"

And then through both their minds simultaneously flew the thought "What should I have made of such a life with him?—with her?" It seemed so impossible a speculation for the other, however, that it plunged each

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of them in guilt in their secret consciousness. Lily glanced without a turn of head at the man by her side and found him still looking at the shops, away from her. She could see the half-savage line of jaw and the puckered lips that closed too tightly. He was a strong man at least—brutal, but not querulous—he seemed rather alarming in his strength for the moment. His presence at her side had grown so natural and pleasant in their ripening friendship that she had liked to have him there ; now, for the first time, a hint of danger seemed to pervade him. He crushed her with the weight of his personality, and she realised that had their two lives been linked together—behind the muslin curtains perhaps !—she would have found new elements with which to struggle or to which to submit. In her relations with her husband she had been his equal in strength, though she had appeared to have no influence over him. Ainslie had compassed his own independence, but had never threatened hers. She knew suddenly that there might be a mastery that was not humiliating to her womanhood.

“ Tell me about yourself,” Vane-Hurst said abruptly, and the question was like an electric shock to her mood. “ How long have you been married ? ”

“ Four years.”

“ Well ? ”

“ You know,” she burst out suddenly, her face turned from him, and the words a surprise to herself, “ all my world must know—that it has been a failure.”

He did know. But he had not realised until the moment how much it had meant to the pride of the woman beside him that she had been universally commented upon as “ poor Mrs Ainslie Devereux ! ” They—the world she spoke of was “ they ” to Vane-Hurst’s mind

as well as her own—had recognised her as having failed, and had regarded her as suffering in a slow-witted fashion for her husband's notoriety. But they had not realised that slow wits may not be accompanied by a thick skin. She had felt her humiliation through her apparent placidity, and had perhaps struggled against it unavailingly. What he did not question was how it had come about that he had quickened into an interest sufficiently strong to appreciate her suffering, or the development that had taken place in her, gradually, from her first dull awakening to it. He only felt the call upon his sympathy, and it made his voice very kind.

"Was it a failure from the first?"

"Not just at first perhaps—I did not know. Oh, in the first two years, I think. Since then it has been obvious."

Yes, two years since Ainslie had been welcomed back to the gay aspects of his bachelorhood, and had been pronounced "very little changed" by the women who had held him in thrall in a succession that had culminated in this year's madness. There had been comment before, there had been scandal of late. From a neglected wife Lily Devereux had become an outraged figure, only avoiding the open breach by the virtue of her nonentity. She had not asked for pity—she was not asking for it now. If she bared her wounds to a friend it was only because she yielded to the temptation of sympathy.

"Look here," he said, with a practical roughness that seemed to bring him much nearer, "you needn't take it hardly. It's not a solitary case—there's a lot of give and take in marriage. I could name a dozen cases."

She smiled a little sadly. "Yes, at what you would call equal weights!"

"Oh, I don't class you with *them*—I don't want you

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to be like them ! I only meant that you're not as remarkable as you—as you fear ? ”

“ I should be better off if I were like them ! ”

“ No ! ” he said thunderously, and the storm in his eyes made her heart throb as if with fear. “ You don't know what men really think of unclassed marriages, or you wouldn't say so for an instant. We see men and women exercising a like tolerance towards each other's infidelities and we say ‘ Poor devil ! what can you expect with such a wife ? ’ or ‘ Little beast !—but she's got a husband that drove her there. ’ You couldn't stand on that level.”

She looked away down the widening road by which the cab was still running steadily north. They were passing Willesden, the world was growing greener, the open spaces flung the town behind, though still the tram lines ran on and on ahead of them, as if never to be shaken off.

“ No,” she said gently. “ I couldn't.”

There was a satisfied silence on the word. Vane-Hurst settled himself back in his seat, and looked away to the opening country. Lily did not catch a glimpse of his face, but she breathed freer, as if with the escape from the confinement of the streets she felt less of the confinement of life and its binding laws. The fields that the builders had not yet invaded were sweet with innocent hay—here and there allotment grounds brought a more cheerful labour than shopkeeping into notice.

“ Where are we ? ” she asked in a lower voice.

“ Somewhere about Wembly now. We shall find the park in a few minutes.”

“ It really *is* the country ! ” she said, as one who emerges from a bad dream.

“ It will be,” he answered, as they turned from the

highroad into a lane framed with hedges and smelling of young green leaves. The cab bumped over heavy ruts, for there had been rain of late, and passed a white gate into yet rougher parts. "We've come down well," Vane-Hurst said, looking at his watch. "Done it in forty-five minutes."

But Lily did not hear. "Oh!" she said. "There is a stream—and willows—and buttercups!"

"You child!" he exclaimed, laughing. "I believe you would like to get out and pick them!"

She coloured hotly at the challenge, and Vane-Hurst was delighted. He thought it was that she was vulnerable to his teasing, and the power to call the blood to her cheeks made her more defenceless and gave him the sense of mastery that he strove for by instinct. Mrs Devereux's real reason for blushing was a more subtle one, however. It was not the being convicted of sentiment, or even of foolishness, that affected her, but the words in themselves. No one in her lonely dignity had ever dared to accuse her of youth, and there was something in Major Teddy's voice that made "child" a term of endearment. She was afraid that if he said it again she might betray the same sweet shock, and sat rigid and silent while they drove up to the ground and came to a standstill in a line of other vehicles below the stand.

"Come along—we're only just in time—they're going to begin," he said hastily, turning as he alighted to put a strong hand under her arm to help her down. "You can pick wild flowers on the way home!"

He laughed again, and led the way into the stand, and Mrs Devereux followed him, tongue-tied. The motors had filled her with a momentary regret of which she was ashamed, that after all there would be a crowd to spoil

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the pleasure of the afternoon, but there was hardly anyone to share the iron chairs and tables on the little verandah of the club-house, which it itself was but a corrugated-zinc building. A solitary motor—a private car—was drawn up beyond the verandah in the shade, and a girl in a flowery hat remained there in state after her companion withdrew to rid himself of most of his clothes and adopt the usual scanty costume of the players, but the corner where Vane-Hurst placed himself and Mrs Devereux remained uninvaded. They sat down and looked round them with mutual satisfaction. Wembley Park polo-ground looked as good as any in England to uninitiated eyes—as smooth and firm as a billiard-table, and as springy as a cathedral close. Moreover it was backed by trees that were neither thinned nor cut, and the sun set *behind* the club-house—not into it, as at some of the better-known clubs. No one appeared to be at Wembley that afternoon except horsey people and their belongings—men in markedly check knickerbockers with badly shaven faces, who scrambled out of small carts behind game-looking ponies, and rapidly changed into a kind of football costume in the sanctity of the club. Their talk was horse, and their manners were of the earth, earthy. But they meant business.

Vane-Hurst settled to watch, and to point out to Mrs Devereux the beauties of the hard play. They were only members' games that afternoon, and the umpires unofficially announced the arrangements before the stablemen hurried the ponies up from somewhere in the background, and the two teams flung themselves into the saddles, and the ball was thrown into the midst of the group.

"Now they're off!" Vane-Hurst said, leaning forward on the rail to watch the line suddenly streak out

towards the right-hand goal. "They do take it out of their ponies, the beggars!"

I doubt if there is anything more beautiful than physical exercise, or more exciting to watch, whether it be cricket or football, polo or racing, so long as there is any sympathy between the performers and their audience. For a few minutes there was nothing to be seen at the distant goal but a bunch of ponies, and the riders appeared to be chopping the ball out of the turf, one waiting on another as the attacking team forced the defenders back and back into danger—then something happened, it was impossible to see details at a distance—the bunch separated, spread itself, and Yellow's Number Two came away with the ball at a great pace; but half way across, towards the spectators, he missed, and Number Three, who was backing him well, drove it on with a clean smack, and followed up. They were coming—oh, they were coming—the thrum of the ponies' feet a rhythm more maddening than the drums through marching music. The Blue's Number Two leaned in his saddle and reached out for his backhander as the ball passed him, but before he could get down to it the player in Yellow had thrust himself and his galloping pony into the coveted place, and the two went by together, so near that the straining leather and the wind of their going seemed visible things.

"Ridden off!" said Major Teddy, in a queer choked voice. He was gripping the rail with strong hands, and his jaw set like iron as he followed every movement of the players. Mrs Devereux did not turn her head to look at him, but somehow she knew the absorption of his face and figure as well as if she had done so. Nor did it trouble her. Though he talked less to her than at Ranelagh, and seemed almost to have forgotten her in the game, she was conscious of being nearer to him in very

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truth than ever before. It was like a flood of warmth that some electric current between them had driven into her veins. She leaned against the railing too, and held her breath as the ball struck the boards and the teams came down upon it.

"Ah! Now you've got it—backhander, *hard!*"

"You hog—you beast—*get on!*"

A pony had refused to gallop, and the ball went up ahead, only to pass behind goal, however, so that the usual pause ensued.

"Oh, what a pity!" said Mrs Devereux instinctively. Vane-Hurst's tense attitude relaxed. He turned and looked at her with quick approbation. "Good thing for them—they can't gallop at that pace all the time!" he said. "Look at that fellow on the black pony. He's Back. They play *together*, these men. There's nothing so fatal at polo as individual geniuses who want to stand out in their own brilliance.

The hit out had struck a pony, and Number Two got in a neat shot at the Blue goal. Mrs Devereux obediently looked at the man playing Back, and with some reverence, for she observed him stop it closely, wheel as on a soup plate, and pass to his Number Three; then, having saved his goal he pulled back to give his team their rightful dues. The ball went over to the opposite boundary, and the game was sticky for a few seconds, but somebody on the Yellow side was a hard hitter, for a minute later the ball came out of the *mêlée* and was cut full thirty yards ahead towards the Blue goal again, and the teams were galloping for all they were worth, and the ponies strained and raced, and the game was one flying vision of lightning angles. How they turned! How they raced! For their blood was up, and they spared neither men nor horses. This was something like play.

"How madly exciting it must be to be in it!" said Lily Devereux with a flash of sympathy. Then she knew she had pleased him, from the face he turned upon her.

"Will you change your mind, and see me play some day?" he said.

She remembered her shrinking fear at Ranelagh, when this friendship first seemed a precious thing, and the little discussion upon men's desire to shine in one woman's eyes—even at a game. But there was something new in her feeling for him to-day—the loss of self and its fears, in the pleasure and praise of manliness, that makes many mothers hide their alarm as the most guarded secret of their hearts, and watch their boys at play with smiling faces and unrecorded heroism. For English games can be horribly like other nations' responsible dangers. Mrs Devereux looked at Vane-Hurst anew as she might have looked at a phantom son at school.

"I should like to," she said quietly.

"You are not so afraid now you know more of the game?"

"I have more faith in you."

"Ah!"—

The ball was coming across the ground again, driven back from goal, towards the spectators. There was a good deal of personal observation among the players, and some calling of Christian names, audible even in the club-house verandah. "Take it, Harry!" "Leave it, Frank!" then a closer medley, the ball up against the boards, a player cutting fruitlessly at the aggravating object, while the game hung breathlessly.

"Has Devereux ever spoken of your coming out with me?" said Vane-Hurst suddenly. Even the critical point of the chukker failed to hold him at this moment. He turned to Lily with the spontaneous question.

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She flushed suddenly—a bitter red—while her eyes remained steadily on that straining, hard-breathing group. The creaking of saddle leather was audible in her pause, and the click of the polo sticks. Yet she hardly hesitated.

“The other day—when we got back from Battersea—he was at the School—he had followed me——”

“Refer him to me!” The voice was more ominous than the words.

“Oh, it was not that—unfortunately. I do not care about his anger—I could laugh—after this season! But he wanted—he has followed me—since——” The memory of the new danger she had flouted made her flinch now.

“You mean his interest in you—his personal interest—has reawakened?”

“I am afraid of that——”

The game had been worked back to the centre of the ground again. The Blue’s Number Two was away with a clean run, but sliced the ball so that it struck the boards and hopped out of bounds, and a pony jumped the rail after it before he could be pulled on to his haunches. “Blast!” said a young voice forcibly, as the stroke spent itself on empty air. It exactly conveyed Vane-Hurst’s feelings.

Mrs Devereux laughed tremulously as the ball was thrown in again by the umpire, and the teams took it away from proximity of the spectators. But the game was over in a few more minutes. The Blue’s Back got in a bit of brilliant play before time, and feeding the Forwards drove the Yellows-back to their goal—there was a last sprint from the hard-worked ponies, and somebody made a record stroke that sent the ball forty yards, straight through the goal posts, scoring the sixth to the victors.

"What a splendid game!" Mrs Devereux said rather breathlessly. "I have enjoyed it so." The red had lingered in her face, and a new and troubled happiness was in her grave eyes. She remembered, as if it were photographed on her brain, a little narrow strip of room and ugly stained-glass panes above casemented windows. Also a dressing-table with smelling-salts that had seemed superfluous, and a woman who spoke ominous words. "Only don't lose the end in the means, as I did!"

It was with her all the afternoon, through the succeeding play and the bright sunshine, and the velvet green of the polo-ground which was really before her physical eyes. They did not stay until the end, but they had some tea in one of the intervals, and then he asked her if she were ready to go. As she followed him out of the verandah she looked up at his broad shoulders and the shining hair that was almost boyish in contrast to his stern face. It seemed to her that a silence more outspoken than words had fallen between them. Was this losing the end in the means? Did her purpose of attracting her husband end in nothing but dismay at her success, and the decoy she had used threaten to be her own lure? In her panic she was as silent as he when she took her place again by his side, and the cab turned out of the line and away from the ground.

It was a quiet sunny evening to usher them back into London. But now Lily did not feel the reluctance to leave the green lanes and fields to the extent that she had rejoiced to get rid of the streets. She was distracted by a more mental disturbance; yet she had a queer little feeling that she took her happiness with her. It did not lie in green fields. Even the lace curtains and the india-rubber plants in the sordid little streets might be bearable—she knew that now—under some circumstances.

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Most of the shops were closed, but the people—the tired dusty people—still passed by on the pavements in an endless procession. A new charity, however, clothed them with something better than thirty-shilling suits in Lily Devereux's eyes. She did not see the tawdriness for the humanity.

"Poor dears!" she said with a sudden kindness.

A girl with beautiful red hair and a baby under a dirty shawl passed by bareheaded. A child cried, hustled out of the way by two rougher boys, and Vane-Hurst winced. Lily understood. She stretched out her hand and laid it on his arm.

"It wasn't hurt," she said. "Did you see the girl with the red hair?"

"Yes," he said turning to her as one sure of being understood. "It made me sick to look at her face—she was hardly fit to be a woman."

"She had a baby in her arms!"

"That was probably her tragedy."

"Yet the common name for them in her class is a love-child!"

"Yes, and do you know," he said, in the extraordinarily emphatic manner that made small things seem of vital importance, "that love-children are often the most beautiful? Far more so than the children of legitimate marriages?"

"Not in such a class as that," she said briefly, staring at the hard grey of the Marble Arch as it rose abruptly out of the Edgware Road.

"No—but this——" He looked at the wider world around them. People were driving home, weary of the Park. The West End had suddenly superseded the North. "Among us—the child of a love match is the most perfect and beautiful thing in the world."

"It should be," she answered quite simply, without any bias of conventional shame.

Then they were silent, while the cab turned into Piccadilly in a golden blaze of western light, and swung them down to Pont Street. At her own door he got out and helped her to alight, following her up the steps and standing beside her until the door was answered. There was no least embarrassment in either of them, though it was in both their minds that Devereux might be returning from his club at any moment. To Vane-Hurst it would have been a choice encounter. To Lily it was insignificant. Ainslie had ceased to matter: but what did matter was the warning voice of her memory—"Take care that you do not lose the end in the means—as I did."

"May I come to tea to-morrow?" Major Teddy said simply as he raised his hat. The door was open at last. There was nothing more to do but shake hands.

"No," she said quietly. "Not to-morrow. I have—I have some thinking to do."

CHAPTER XIII

"When I meet you, can I greet you with a haughty little stare, Scarcely glancing where you're prancing by me on the chestnut mare ?

Still dissembling, though I'm trembling—thus you know, we're trained and taught.

For I like you—doesn't it strike you ?—like you more than p'r'aps I ought ! "

WHYTE MELVILLE.

" . . . AND she had to borrow one from the housemaid at the hotel—which they thought was conclusive evidence in court ! " said Lady Herring as she sat down in the " Royal Box," and looked over the balustrade into the Riding School.

" I suppose nobody questioned the housemaid's right to possess it ! " said Lady Malbrook, pulling the curtain behind her so that they were practically shut in with their confidences. For the caretaker was out of hearing.

" Oh, my dear, who questions the right of that class to anything ! They have infinitely the best of it all round." Lady Herring leaned her square white chin in her hand and looked down at the gulf of the School below her where three mounted figures were circling round on the tan—two small people on ponies, and one large person on a horse. " This is a capital place for a talk ! " she remarked. " How did you think of it, Muriel ? "

" I came to see the children ride ! " said Lady Malbrook with dignity. " One must just overlook them occasionally, and see how they get on in things." She really must have felt her duty very seriously, for she was not

even accompanied by the Pekinese to-day ; and they were usually inseparable.

" Their Riding Master is very good-looking ! " said Lady Herring with the tone of one making further discoveries.

" That doesn't matter at present——"

" Oh no—not for the children. They are heartless little pigs. I daresay Sweetie would kick Adonis, and Viva is probably in love with the ponies."

" I don't understand Viva," admitted Lady Malbrook for the hundredth time. " And I don't believe anyone else does. She will be dreadfully difficult when she comes out. Sweetie is simply naughty. But Dulcie Vane-Hurst tells me this man really manages her as no one else has done."

She nodded indication of the Riding Master, who at the moment glanced up and saw the occupants of the gallery. He raised his hat and his face became a little more alert even than its wont.

" He really *is* very good-looking ! " said Lady Herring indolently. " Did you say he taught Dulcie ? "

" Yes, but she's too young also—to have a taste that way you know. It comes later—when you've tried most other ways."

" Love of change ! " said Lady Herring cynically. " A thing men never admit is our due, though they urge it on themselves after the honeymoon."

" Half way through, sometimes ! "

" Yes, the housemaid at the hotel ! " Lady Herring laughed. " I asked a man once why a cap and apron made a woman irresistible. He was most vague. He could only say that it was a thing no woman could understand. I agreed that certainly we did not find the average waiter had attractions ! "

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"No, not the waiter," said Lady Malbrook musingly. "Still—I don't know——" She looked round her discontentedly. "He might have thought of the chauffeur rage!"

"Or the skating instructors, or the fencing professors—my dear, men don't know half, and don't guess the rest. They are not taught physical exercises by women!"

"Clare!" said Lady Malbrook with instinctive protest. There was an indifference to actual statements in Lady Herring which left other women gasping. "I sometimes think you don't know the half you confess."

"I haven't anything to confess." Lady Herring shrugged her shoulders. "If I had I should hold my tongue. I am a philosopher and an observer, and I like to trace out the root and reason of things. Other women, who do them, don't care to think of their original roots and reasons."

Lady Malbrook leaned a little further over the balustrade. "Viva rides very well!" she said in a voice that sounded muffled, for her face was turned away.

Lady Viva was as a fact strung to the acme of effort. Above her were her mother and her mother's intimate friend, looking on while she rode at Lancelot's side, the exhibition of his skill. By some fine sense of divination she knew that on this occasion he wished her to do well, and she quivered with eagerness to obey him. Sweetie, on his other side, was also spurred to good behaviour by an audience. She was quite convinced that the attention of both ladies was concentrated on her fair little self, and she rode with inexpressible coquetry and consciousness for their sole benefit.

"Women are like naughty children as much as anything," went on Lady Herring quietly. "They know quite well when they are doing something wrong—a little

degrading too. And it is just that that attracts them as much as the novelty."

"I think it is chiefly because we have been told we mustn't. That is human nature under an unnatural law. If we could abolish the seventh commandment to-morrow, nobody would want to commit adultery. . . ."

Down in the Riding School Lady Sweetie had just launched into pleasant converse with the Riding Master, despite his lack of encouragement, for she found that enforced rectitude tried her powers without distraction of some sort.

"When I grow up," she announced calmly. "I shall marry a duke." Which prophetic utterance was actually fulfilled some eleven years later.

"You said you were going to marry the butcher the other day!" Lady Viva reminded her reproachfully, mindful of the atmosphere of discomfort this had caused in the family.

"That *was* the other day!" retorted the Lady Sweetie in undeniable argument.

"Suppose you attend to your riding, and talk about all that when the times comes," interposed the Riding Master with the practical common-sense that threatened Sweetie's effort at good behaviour by a sense of aggravation. She looked mutinous, the straight Egyptian brows lowering over her large brown eyes; but the Riding Master gave the order to trot, and the action saved the situation. The three figures simultaneously broke into a quicker pace, and went round the ring in admirable order.

"Do look at Sweetie! She rides just like a miniature dragoon." Lady Malbrook laughed, leaning her charming face over the balustrade to nod and kiss her hand to the children as they came round. Sweetie waved her hand frantically, nearly endangering her own seat and

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the pony's equilibrium as well ; but Viva rode straight on, with one swift smile for her mother and a covert glance at the Riding Master that she might not fail to follow his wishes even in this.

" By the way," said Lady Herring, as the riders passed on and began to " right incline " and " left incline," and " circle " for their benefit. " Talking of dragoons puts me in mind of Teddy Vane-Hurst. What is to be the end of this business ? "

" Ask me something I know. We are so amazed that we don't know whether to laugh or protest. Lily, of all women ! "

" I unwittingly let her husband half into the secret at Tattersall's one day, by telling him that she had taken to bridge——"

" If it were only bridge it wouldn't matter. She has plenty of money."

" It seems to have been the beginning of the change in her. She asked me to a foursome there, and laughed and talked with Chateris and Vane-Hurst as if she were a new creature."

" I can't fancy her as a hostess ! "

" Nevertheless it was a pleasant party, and she managed those two men admirably. You know what Teddy is at bridge !—and Ernest Chateris hates him. But we got through without a hitch."

" I hear she has been seen at Ranelagh with him. It's so stupid of her to make herself conspicuous."

" You've done it often enough, and so have I."

" Yes, but we—we—oh well, Lily Devereux has sat in the shade for so long that she can't afford to come out into the open all at once. Minnie told me they were always there, sitting by themselves and not speaking to anybody."

"That's not true, because I expected to meet them on several occasions and they were not there. I took Ainslie down once, because I thought an encounter would be amusing, but Lily and Teddy never turned up, and I was only bored for my trouble. I can't think where they have been of late. They must have got a new haunt."

"You are sure they have been together?"

"They have both been missing, which is evidence conclusive enough for the social courts."

"Well, I don't know what is to be done. Ainslie made the name of Devereux conspicuous enough, running after the Errington woman. And now Lily is making it worse."

"Have you spoken to her?"

"I don't like to. Somehow she is a woman one doesn't interfere with. I never said one word about Ainslie to her directly, even when the scandal was at its height."

"He seems to have tired of Jewel Errington—or she of him."

"He looks in a furious temper anyhow, and he haunts his wife—which gives the whole thing away so! It really seems as if he hankered after his own property—now that he can't have her. But Ainslie was always a man who wanted the impossible."

"He's a sportsman, my dear," said Lady Herring, and her weary eyes were shrewd with wisdom. "It is the instinct of the hunter."

"It is the instinct of the dog-in-the-manger!" said Lady Malbrook with much exasperation. "Why can't men be just? He didn't want his wife, and he made it patent. Now that another man does, apparently, he might have the courtesy to let her alone as she did him."

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I think they are both fools, and I sympathise very much with Lily."

Lady Herring broke into the deep laugh which was one of her most masculine attributes. "Ha! ha!" she said, where another woman would have given a pretty feminine ripple. "Your sentiments are beyond criticism, Muriel. If a man could hear you he would be properly shocked."

"Well, I don't care. Women are not so down-trodden nowadays that they are bound to play Griselda to their husband's Don Juan. Lily had every right—if only it doesn't end in a worse scandal! You see they are relations of ours, or one wouldn't care." She shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"Yes, the worst of it is that Lily Devereux takes things too seriously. She is likely to make a whole tragedy out of what would only be an *entre-act* in the hands of an experienced woman. She will think it a solemn thing to be in love. Most women find it a minor detail after all."

"Love is a game," said Lady Malbrook seriously, leaning a pretty chin in two discontented hands. "Certainly it is a game I shall never get tired of playing as long as there is anyone to play it with me," she added honestly. "But it cannot be reckoned with the real things of life."

"And yet the consequences have a way of being so damnably obtrusive!" mused Lady Herring. "I suppose because woman was the Almighty's last work, she always strikes me as having been made so carelessly in comparison to all the rest. Perhaps He grew tired. At all events her creation does Him no credit!"

"Well," said Lady Malbrook in the tone of one summing

up, " I am very sorry for Lily in spite of her folly, and I have asked her down to Plym ! "

" What on earth for ? "

" To get her out of it, of course—to get her right away. Could anybody go to a more inaccessible place than our ancestral acres ? If it were not a tradition older than the Coat-of-Arms that a Malbrook must own Plym Castle I believe we should have got rid of the place ages ago."

" It's entailed, isn't it ? "

" Yes, but we've no boy, and the next heir—Arthur Beauman—would gladly assist us in disposing of a place he can't possibly afford to keep up ! "

" I always thought it rather unkind of you not to have a house in the Midlands, I must own ! It is either one end of Britain or the other with you."

" I know. Dumfriesshire is out of the way enough—but Plymouth ! Is isn't even like North Devon, where we could have a party for the staghounds in August. I assure you, Clare, people actually fight shy of Plym, it's such a long way. It's all we can do to get a house party."

" Is that why you have asked Lily ? " said Lady Herring drily.

" Well—she may as well come. There are only a few connections of George's who must be asked, and a spare man or so to play cards. It means a month's boredom, and then, thank heaven ! we go to Dumfriesshire."

" You will miss half the grouse shooting if you stay a month at Plym. Are the children going with you ? "

" No, it's too relaxing for them. I'm leaving them in town for a week after we leave, just to finish up their dancing classes, and this sort of thing—" she nodded at the riders "—and then they are going to the Norfolk coast. Viva always wants bracing up after we have been in town."

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"I see. By the way, Dulcie Vane-Hurst told me ages ago that she was coming to you in August, and going cub-hunting on the moor!"

"Oh yes, George promised to take her out, if the first meet comes before we leave. It all depends on the harvest, and it looks as if it would be early this year. The sport is not much, but it will show her something, I suppose. Poor Dulcie! she thought Digby Errington would be down, you know; he stays with the Stammers at Ivybridge, only six miles from Plym. Well, that's all knocked on the head!"

"I was rather tickled at the idea of old Vane-Hurst coming out as the heavy father!" said Lady Herring. "I can't think what was the first little lever to set that ball rolling." She looked down unconsciously, and her eyes fell on Lady Sweetie, looking like a boy angel, and making eyes at the gallery. Lady Herring remarked mentally on her beauty, but she never connected the young lady with her tentative observation. Lady Sweetie as the goddess from the machine was not often recognised until too late.

"At any rate he has been given his *congé* very distinctly for the present," said Lady Malbrook. "I haven't seen him of late. I suppose he is moping."

"All the Erringtons seem to have faded on the social horizon," remarked Lady Herring. "I haven't seen Jewel for ages. I'm sorry. Her peccadilloes amused me."

"I wonder what Ainslie will do with himself this summer. I won't have him at Plym. It's not fair to Lily. She wants a rest!"

"But did it never strike you that if you have Dulcie Vane-Hurst, nothing is easier for her brother than to find an excuse to come into your neighbourhood and look after his sister?"

" I don't think he knows anyone thereabouts——"

" There are hotels in Plymouth, I suppose ! "

" And anyhow I can't disappoint Dulcie ! "

Lady Herring laughed her deep laugh again. " Why aren't you honest, and own that the affair is a little exciting, and that you want to keep your eye on it ? " she said. Her glance met Lady Malbrook's. The latter struggled with herself for an instant and then joined in the laugh, even while she turned herself absently to watch the children, cantering by in admirable time and order.

" Lancelot," Lady Viva was saying at the moment that they drew rein. " Were you ever divorced ? "

The Riding Master looked round quickly, and with the emphatic disapproval in his face which betrayed his class (for even Lady Malbrook would have had to suppress a laugh), and met the limpid gaze of the child's beautiful eyes.

" Little girls are not supposed to talk about that sort of thing," he said decidedly. " If you don't know the meaning of words you had better not use them, my lady."

Viva's delicate brows contracted over her asking eyes. The Riding Master's rebuke fell short of her conviction.

" But it can't be anything wrong," she said to reassure him. " Because it's what my cousin Lily and her husband are going to be. I have heard several people say that it will come to that before the end."

Perhaps the Riding Master cursed the carelessness that had brought such discussions into the child's hearing, but if so his face did not betray him. Only his strong grey eyes held hers for a moment before he spoke, and the long gaze was, unintentionally, his rescue from the

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difficulty. Lady Viva forgot her abstract subject in the admiration of her material hero.

"Oh, Lancelot," she said under her breath, for fear Sweetie should overhear, "I do think you are so beautiful when you shut your mouth like that! I wish you wore armour—you would be exactly like Arthur's knight, I know!"

Anything less like the description of the famous warrior in Tennyson's "Idylls" it would have been difficult to find; for in place of Sir Lancelot's lean face and coal-black curls, the Riding Master was a very good type of the crop-haired young Englishman of to-day, whose colouring is Saxon rather than swarthy, and whose physique has flourished on good food and exercise. But Lady Viva had rejected the pictured Lancelot from the first, and installed the Riding Master in his place, with the simple additions of chain mail and surcoat for his tweed riding jacket and breeches, and a crimp-maned war horse (rather of the type she had seen in hearses) for the hogged and clipped hack he bestrode. It is possible that even his matter-of-fact self-possession might have been embarrassed by such open adoration, had not the Lady Sweetie proved a most unusual benefactor by an interruption. She could not follow the low-toned conversation between her sister and the Riding Master, and to be left out in the cold was a thing she never tolerated.

"I want to do m'nœuvres to show mother that we can!" she cried, with a little pinch of the Riding Master's knee to attract his attention. "Can't we do m'nœuvres? It's so dull goin' round and round like this—I know Satan will come into me in a minute! Dear Jones! good Jones—do let us do m'nœuvres!"

The prohibited title of Jones proved that Satan was certainly not far off, and the Riding Master thought it

wise to ignore the small indiscretion and to do as she asked. "M'nœuvres" had been introduced into the lessons to teach the children prompt and ready obedience, for the Riding Master had been in the Yeomanry at one point in his career, and he issued the orders with a snap that forced their whole attention. Right and left turn, walk, march, trot, gallop—they could follow in their small way, but the joy of the thing to the Lady Sweetie was when the master sat his horse in the centre of the School, turned it deftly as if on its own axis, and Viva and she rode round him at set distances to represent the squadron. It would have been more fun in a larger space and with more riders, but anyhow it was charming to have to keep place and trot or canter on the larger circle as the central figure turned.

This was the ending of the lesson, for the half hour was up, and Lady Malbrook expressed herself as delighted when the children rushed up into the gallery, breathless, to learn how she had thought they did it.

"Capital!" she said. "You have got on wonderfully. Why, you will be able to hunt with your father soon!" Then she turned her gracious face to the Riding Master who had followed his pupils rather slowly—almost as if the mother's radiant presence daunted him for once. "I am so much obliged to you!" she said. "I shall tell Lord Malbrook how fearless they are growing. But he must come down and see them for himself."

"I think I should wait another season before he takes them to hounds," said the Riding Master a trifle anxiously. "They are perfectly fearless—a little too much so if anything. And they want a few jumping lessons."

"Oh yes, they must learn to jump of course—you must give them some lessons in the autumn," said Lady Mal-

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brook vaguely. Her eyes smiled at the Riding Master as she drew her fluffy boa over her shoulders, and one audacious dimple suddenly showed in her cheek. Then her head moved, ever so slightly, with an indicative glance that somehow took in the children and their nurses, Lady Herring, and the caretaker, Rivers, who was also in attendance. "Good-afternoon!" she said smoothly. "I'm so glad to have seen them ride—so pretty!—and quite satisfactory. Is the carriage still here? Come along, Clare."

"Are you taking the chicks?" asked Lady Herring as she rose in a leisurely fashion and trailed across the gallery, her big person seeming as if it could never hurry or be flustered whatever the concern.

"No, I have no room for them to-day. Nurse will take you home, children—you have been very good, and there will be something for you in the nursery when you get home."

"Goodies! Don't you wish you could have some of them?" said Lady Sweetie as her mother vanished. Some of the light of the waning afternoon seemed to follow her bright beautiful presence, and the Riding Master had stood still a moment looking after her, when his attention was recalled by Sweetie's question and her small hands tugging at his sleeve. The next pupil had not arrived that he knew of, and he allowed himself to be pulled down into one of the empty chairs in the "Royal Box," for a few minutes, and unbent his teaching dignity in a laughing romp with the children while Nurse fetched their coats and caps. Sweetie promptly knocked off his hat and pummelled him, and Viva rubbed her own curls slyly against his head to roughen the little tendrils of hair into the disorder she loved. He pinioned Sweetie easily with one hand, but then Viva pinioned him, and

the game was at its height when no less a person than Miss Dulcie Vane-Hurst emerged from the dressing-room for her last leaping lesson. There was a subtle change in the young face to-day, and her eyes looked suspiciously languid, but the expression altered momentarily to one of simple surprise as she came on the laughing group in the curve of the gallery.

The Riding Master rose the instant he became aware of her presence ; but he stood there as if almost taken unawares in romping with the children, his face flushed with the tussle in which Viva had rumbled his bright hair, the grey of his eyes darkened with laughter.

" Good gracious ! " said Miss Dulcie to herself. " How ridiculously handsome ! "

She was a generous little lady, and largely tolerant. But it did strike her that such good looks were wasted on the Riding Master, when it would have been so nice if they had occurred in ballrooms or country houses where one met people. . . . As Lady Malbrook had said, " Dulcie was too young also—to have a taste that way." Another class than her own simply did not exist for her.

The Riding Master was the first to recover himself. " One moment, miss ! " he said breathlessly, and was gone, his square shoulders and closely knit figure vanishing down the stairs with the words. Miss Dulcie greeted the children, and then followed him more slowly. When she emerged into the School there was only Blackleigh there holding Capulet ; but before she was mounted the Riding Master had reappeared, pulling on his gloves. The flush had disappeared, and the little ripple of his hair under his hat was as correctly brushed as usual. He stood looking critically at his pupil as she settled herself, with the line of his lips a trifle compressed. If one could have suspected him of embarrassment it might

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have been suggested that he was rather more the Riding Master than usual to balance his late dishevelment. Miss Dulcie smiled a little whimsically, but the smile faded more quickly than usual from her lips, and the careworn look returned. It was in her eyes even while she turned her face abstractedly to the Riding Master's earnest instructions, in her set lips even as she took the "in and out" jump, and held Capulet mechanically to her task. With his quick intuition for his pupils, whether humans or horses, the Riding Master divined that the lesson was not going to absorb his hearer's inner consciousness as he preferred, and after a dozen jumps or so he called halt, and began to ride slowly round the School with her, impressing on her anew what he had said, for he thought she was tired. But she only gave a monosyllabic, "Yes," to his instructions, and after a few minutes this became a mere nod with her face turned steadily to her horse's ears. The Riding Master was a little nonplussed, and looked round at her more intently to discover the reason. He found it in the girl's quivering under lip, and the tears that were running quietly down her face.

Miss Dulcie arguing, laughing, or chattering until her attention had to be reclaimed to her lesson, was a familiar experience enough, but Miss Dulcie crying, with her misery obviously beyond her control, was so novel a sight that for the minute the Riding Master did not know how to cope with the situation. He thought, naturally enough, that there must be some rupture between her and Sir Digby Errington, though no rumour of Colonel Vane-Hurst's new obstruction to their understanding had drifted to the School as yet. The Riding Master heard many things in many ways, but he was often left to patch in the smaller events of the story, that made the

links in the chain. It was like a serial with a few numbers missing of the periodical in which it appeared. One guessed how the plot must run.

"I think you are tired to-day, mith, and perhaps you would rather not go on with the lethon," he said with kindly authority, though the stress of the occasion betrayed his s's.

"No—no—it doesn't matter. I want to jump—I feel I must do something!"—Miss Dulcie gulped bravely, and tried to control her muffled voice. 'I'm awfully upset. I'm in great trouble," she admitted, feeling vaguely for the handkerchief which she had tucked into her cuff, military fashion.

"Yes, miss," said the Riding Master in a take-it-for-granted fashion. He possessed himself of her reins to leave her hands free, and they proceeded slowly onwards, Miss Dulcie dabbing her eyes and utterly callous as to Capulet, who, good beast, allowed the Master to guide both horses with no trouble. It did glimmer through the Riding Master's mind that if Mrs Rivers should be looking down on them from the gallery she must be wondering what severity on his part could have reduced his pupil to tears; but being a prosaic young man he did not torture himself with possible complications, but faced the necessity of the moment.

"I'm sorry you're in trouble, miss," he said simply, "I thought you were tired."

"About my brother——" Miss Dulcie explained, so unexpectedly that the Riding Master found himself obliged to alter all his foregone conclusions. "And—and—a wicked woman!"

For the minute the Riding Master did not speak. A vision of Major Teddy, very big, very capable, and quite unlikely to be beguiled by anything feminine, arose on

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his mental horizon and rendered him dumb. He was, in fact, convinced that if Miss Dulcie's brother got into any trouble with a petticoat it would be one into which he deliberately walked on his own account, and the person to be helplessly involved would be the lady. Something of this was in his expression, had Miss Dulcie been able to read it, as he tilted up his chin in a manner characteristic of him and closed his lips yet more firmly before he opened them.

"I should think, miss, that Major Vane-Hurst was quite capable of taking care of himself!" he said oracularly.

But Miss Dulcie's handkerchief blinded her physically as much as her experience of her half-brother did mentally.

"He isn't—oh, he isn't!" she contradicted emphatically. "You don't know how easily he is led!—all men are, when a woman is absolutely unscrupulous."

The indignation of the tone made the Riding Master pause again. He looked almost comically at Major Teddy's champion, and suppressed a smile.

"Well, miss—you see I don't know the lady."

"Yes, you do—she has had lessons here. I believe she learnt because she knew he liked horses!" said Miss Dulcie viciously, and with the injustice born of feminine conclusions. "It's Mrs Devereux—everyone's talking about them, and poor Teddy is quite changed, and I know it's all her fault!"

The Riding Master possessed a certain knowledge that lent colour to part of the assertion—without unreasoning violence. On several occasions Mrs Devereux had elected to ride in Battersea Park in preference to the Row, as being quieter, and Major Vane-Hurst had joined them there and ridden with them. Between the two men Lily had been forced to do wonders that she would

have refused to believe of herself ; but it had, in spite of Vane-Hurst's presence, been strictly a riding lesson, and the Riding Master could recall no familiarity that had betrayed any scandal such as Miss Dulcie asserted. They seemed excellent companions ; they might be friends. But it had seemed to him that Major Vane-Hurst's characteristic good nature had been the moving force to bring him into Mrs Devereux's riding lesson—as indeed at the time it had. Furthermore it was no business of the Riding Master's to make mischief, and to inform Dulcie that he himself had chaperoned the scandal would only have made it more certain to her mind. So he held his tongue, as he had learned to do, and let Miss Dulcie speak and outline the situation.

“ They go about together, and father is getting quite annoyed about it. Oh, I couldn't believe it at first, when somebody hinted at it to me ! Everyone is beginning to think that there will be a dreadful ending—a regular smash up. And Mr Devereux is threatening all sorts of things. Poor, poor Teddy ! To be mixed up with a married woman ! Supposing he runs away with her ! ”

“ I don't suppose he'll do that, miss. And Mrs Devereux doesn't seem the kind of lady—well, of course it's not my business.”

“ Oh but it is—I mean, I understand just what you think. We all thought the same. She's took us all in. She's a bad, horrid, fast woman, behind that stupid dull manner ! ”

The Riding Master said nothing. He did not think Mrs Devereux was any of those things, but the outburst seemed to do Miss Dulcie good, and he did not argue. She sat up and put the handkerchief away, and took the reins again, declaring herself prepared to go on with her lesson. And indeed the stating of her trouble seemed to have

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lifted it from her mind, for she did better in the latter half of her lesson, and gave her whole attention to the master's adjurations. It was to be her last before she left town for the moors where she hoped to have her first experience in cub hunting, and the Riding Master's advice to her was both earnest and careful. Yet, while he did his best to armour her against faults or dangers, a little wonder would keep flitting through his mind at the new development of the story he had heard—the story which involved the Devereuxs, and the Vane-Hursts and Erringtons, and even drew the Malbrooks and their children as supplementary characters into its coils. It teased him with idle speculations as to Mrs Devereux and Major Vane-Hurst, though he resolutely put it on one side for the duty before him, and when Miss Dulcie at last said good-bye and thanked him for his trouble and training, he still found himself meditating on the intricacies of a girl's mind which could be so moved and agitated over a mere fraternal peccadillo.

Still more strange, and very pitiful, he might have judged the lot of women could he have known that while such anxiety for Teddy Vane-Hurst beset little Miss Dulcie, no shadow of treachery darkened her fearless faith in Digby Errington. She held the fortress of her heart for him, incredulous of such ill-faith as might lurk in a certain house in Little Mayfair Street that smelt so strongly of kuss-kuss, or of a temptation ominously liable to be repeated. For the brother she thought she knew she admitted her misgivings, but for the lover no woman ever knows she would have pledged her belief as certainly as if her soul stood sentinel to his honour !

CHAPTER XIV

“ Fail I alone, in words and deeds ?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds ?
We rode ; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought, All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past !
I hoped she would love me. Here we ride.”

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE intimacy between Mrs Devereux and Vane-Hurst had been fostered by the fact that his visits to her did not depend on leave as they would have done had he remained with his regiment all through the season. The Blacks had gone, but Major Vane-Hurst had not gone with them, being detained by a special commission that had rashly applied for his services. The appointment at the War Office was likely to terminate in the autumn, however, the special work upon which he was engaged being nearly exhausted. Had Major Teddy not been an expert it is probable that his detention in Whitehall would not have lasted three weeks, for he was by no means the malleable type so desirable in an institution whose methods are complicated by considerations not always put down in the reports. What he thought, he said, and what he said was very frequently unpalatable.

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"Vane-Hurst," said the Head of a Department inclusively, "is an honest man, For the moment we want honest men to inquire into a system that has become a scandal. But as a general rule honesty is less imperative than that. Vane-Hurst is not conspicuous for a nice adjustment of errors."

Nobody was more conspicuous in lack of the quality than Major Teddy, and that he did not blunder into an open rupture with Those in Authority was probably due to the fact that he was allowed very little line. He went to tea with Mrs Ainslie Devereux on the very day that Lady Malbrook and Lady Herring went to the Riding School, and explained his theories to her, with his inevitable decision.

"I shall be glad to be rid of the job," he said. "It's deuced hard work, and practically for nothing."

"Why? Haven't you succeeded in getting any reforms?"

"Precious few that are any good. They take with one hand and give back with the other. It's only scotching the snake, when it ought to be killed. What we want is a thorough revolution—put a stop to it all, and start on entirely new lines. We could go to Germany for a lesson in this particular case."

She looked across the room at him as he sat in one of her favourite low chairs that cramped his long legs so that they seemed longer than ever stretched out before him. He was not looking at her at the moment, and her eyes lingered with a curious reluctance on his smooth bright hair—the young hair that shone like a boy's in contrast to his harsh face. There were contradictions in Major Teddy.

"You are such an eager reformer!" she said with a half laugh that ended in a rising sigh. "An injustice

changes you into a Don Quixote at once, charging at windmills ! ”

“ I should like a smash into something, I confess—ride full tilt for their confounded red tape and stick-in-the-mud ways ! ” he retorted with a frowning smile. “ Why, when they’ve absolutely proved a system rotten, they try to patch it up and make it look sound on paper ! ”

She looked her sympathy and comprehension without any more amusement in her eyes. Major Teddy stirred his tea and rested his irritation by contemplating her as she sat by the tea-table. Lily Devereux’s ways and habit of thinking was very like a healing hand laid on rasped nerves to him.

“ Well, it won’t last much longer,” he said as he set down the cup. “ And then I shall get back to the regiment, I hope.”

“ Where will you be sent ? ” she asked after a half-minute’s pause. “ The Blacks are at the Curragh, aren’t they ? ”

“ The first division. I expect I shall go to the second.”

“ And that——”

“ India,” he said, and looked at her straight and steadily. “ There are chances for a man to make a name in India, if he has the proper men to back him.”

For a moment it seemed as if something stopped in the room—the pendulum of life, or a human heart, perhaps—then Lily Devereux spoke quite naturally.

“ I shall be sorry if that happens, though I suppose you are right from the point of view of your profession. I hoped you would not go so far out of my life.”

“ We always knew that there was a place where the roads divided, didn’t we ? ” he said, rising suddenly and walking over to the empty hearth beside which she was

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sitting. He leaned his elbow on the mantelshelf and looked down at the coils of her hair, for her head was bent a little.

"Did we?" she asked dully. "We have been such good friends that I hoped it was going to last, I suppose—indefinitely."

He gave a short laugh. "My dear child, don't you know that the best things of this world——"

Then he paused. Into her eyes had come a look of passionate protest and outraged pride; but it was not for him. A man's step going down the passage outside her woman's sanctum had stopped, turned back, and there was a knock at the door.

Lily rose and crossed the room, herself answering the unwelcome knock and standing in the aperture of the open door as if challenging the right to enter. For it was her husband who had interrupted the *tête-à-tête*. He stood in the passage outside, his foot held back from even crossing the threshold of his wife's own sitting-room, and his angry eyes passing her intervening figure with a flash to recognise and register Vane-Hurst's unmistakable stature by the mantelpiece.

"Yes?" said Lily Devereux with the well-bred surprise of any gentlewoman whose lawful privacy has been invaded.

"I was not quite sure if you were here," said Ainslie in sullen explanation of his knock. "I wanted to ask if you are going to my mother's to-night," He spoke coldly, but it was the coldness of frost which burns.

"No, I had no such intention," she retorted with grave courtesy.

"Ah!—I am going, that is all. I hope I have not disturbed your tea! How are you, Teddy?" He nodded slightly to Vane-Hurst, who returned it without

a word. For a minute Ainslie hesitated, a rather sinister speculation in his eyes as to whether the exigencies of the position would force his wife into asking him to enter. But there was no shadow of such a capitulation on Lily's face. She looked at him calmly, supposed that he was going out, and remarked that it looked like rain. And as he turned on his heel she closed the door with a little decisive movement. The man thought of another door in the Riding School that had been closed in his face even more decisively, when his pulses were hotter than now. The woman thought of the moment of hazard that his inopportune appearance had just averted.

She went rather slowly back to her former position, but she did not sit down again. Vane-Hurst stood also, his back to the fireplace now, and his hands rather loosely clasped behind him. He looked straight at Lily while she thoughtfully lifted the little tea-kettle and blew out the useless flame, as if all her mind was simply concentrated on the act.

"Does he often do this?" he asked abruptly.

"No——"

"Come to your 'den' like this—invalidate your privacy, I mean."

"He has never done so before."

"Does he object to your having your friends to tea with you?"

"I have never asked him," she said in slow surprise, lifting her serious eyes to his at last. They had the puzzled ignorance of a child's. The lines round his hard mouth relaxed a little, and he smiled in his kindlier fashion.

"I don't suppose you would. But it struck me that his appearance was not as unpremeditated as he said."

She flushed an honest, mortified red, as if she were going

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to admit a degrading thing. Perhaps it seemed so to her since she had forgotten the purpose for which she had first made an awkward effort to attract other men—the purpose of regaining her lost way with the husband who was another woman's obvious prey. Mrs Errington had warned her with reason not to lose the end in the means.

"He has followed me about of late," she acknowledged in a lower shamed voice. "I do not know why."

"I do," he said with quick assurance, and she read danger again in the tone that admitted how natural it was for a man to follow her. Her eyes fell from his and the silence was troubled. All the usual comfort that had seemed the natural outcome of their companionship had vanished with Devereux's appearance—or perhaps just before. She found herself wishing, for the first time, that he would go, that she might be left alone to face her disarranged thoughts, that the inexplicable strain would end. Vane-Hurst's substantial presence was somehow an aggravation of the turmoil in her mind.

"Will you smoke?" she said with an effort.

"Thanks." He lit a cigarette and flung the spoiled match into the grate with a movement as if he flung away an unwelcome thought. "You will not let any objection of his come between us?" he said forcibly.

"Of course not. I do not admit his right to dominate my friendships."

"Oh, your friendships—Chateris, for instance?"

"Certainly!"

"You don't class me with Chateris?"

"No," she returned calmly. "You are too totally dissimilar." She had a feeling while she spoke that she was curbing a restive horse, and the impression was deepened by the impatient jerk of his head.

"Do you class us together at all?" he persisted.

"I have not thought about it," she returned, thankful that she could speak the truth. A lie always struck her as undignified. "Mr Chateris is a pleasant acquaintance—always courteous, even when we lose at bridge," she added with a slightly humorous smile. "I think I regard him as a desirable partner whatever the game—that is my impression if I analyse it. And I am sure that that is all he would desire."

"It is entirely beside the question all the same," said Vane-Hurst brusquely. "What I want to get at is whether I am simply on the same footing with you as any other man whom you call your friend?"

"I suppose so——" She hesitated. "Perhaps we have had more in common, and it has made us intimate," she admitted with a little difficulty.

"I am glad you grant me that much at least. You would not allow other men the same intimacy?"

"Do you know that you are submitting me to an unparalleled catechism!" she remarked with sudden spirit. "I do not know by what right, and I certainly do not mean to accept it."

The colour had come back to her cheeks, and she looked him squarely in the face, for she was at bay. She wondered for a moment if he knew how her heart was beating, and if he would burst into the stormy anger that she had once or twice witnessed for others. It was not this that she feared, but all her instinct was on guard to prevent a crisis of another sort which might be the outcome of his temper. Her belligerence was just the sort that pleased Major Teddy, however. His eyes lightened and flashed a look at her in which she would read nothing but admiration, and he almost laughed.

"Come, I am glad to have roused you!" he said.

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"We will let it stay at that—for the present. I have never seen you indignant before."

"Really, one is obliged to stand up to you!"

"And you can!" he said exultantly, as if glorying in her unwonted strength. "You are not a woman to be easily managed, are you—or easily handled?"

She turned half pettishly from him, hiding her alarm at the falling cadence of the last few words. "Don't speak of me as if I were one of your polo ponies!" she said.

"Women and horses have many things in common," he retorted. "I have never been beaten yet, however high-couraged my mount."

"You ride too much by force!" she asserted unexpectedly. "Since I have seen you play I almost pity your ponies. You have not a light enough hand with some of them—or perhaps with some of us."

He drew his breath for an instant, and then his voice altered to its lowest and most dangerous tones. "Would you be afraid?" he said, in the soft hurried way that she was dreading.

For a minute the blood sang in her ears and she was conscious of an inarticulate prayer to prevent—something. Then she spoke straight on, knowing that she must not stop, with a careless little laugh.

"Horribly!—I should expect to be bent or broken. Do you know that it is past six? I am so sorry to turn you out, but I have to dress and dine with the Malbrooks."

He accepted the dismissal with a complaisance that was ominous. "We will discuss this further, later on," he said, as he took her hand. "We have plenty of time. You are not going to close your door to me whoever comes and knocks, are you?"

"Certainly not," she said more emphatically than she

intended in her relief at the truce between them. He held her hand for a minute longer, as if he were going to say something more, but the control of her face appeared to stop him. He dropped her hand a little reluctantly and went away, his firm step dying into distance down the corridor, while the woman stood exactly where he had left her, listening to it, with the expression now in her eyes that she had forbidden them in his presence. . . .

Mrs Devereux's maid was waiting to dress her mistress when at last Lily walked slowly upstairs and into her room. She rarely talked to her servants, unless there were some sympathy or kindness to be shown them, and the woman was not surprised that her ministrations were received in silence. She was satisfied to see her mistress look her best, for she took an honest pride in the change in Lily Devereux's looks, nor did she notice anything unusual in her serene manner. It is one of the penalties of natures like Lily's that they preserve the composure of their outward self above a complete eruption of mind. The mental process is not the less painful for the enforced calm. The maid thought that Mrs Devereux was thinking deeply, and wondered if the master were the cause, for Ainslie's escapades and adventures were a far more interesting topic of discussion in the servants' hall than his wife's, even though she had, as they phrased it, "woken up a bit."

"After all, she don't do anything more than other ladies," was the verdict below stairs, with, perhaps, a slight flavour of disappointment. "A few gentlemen to tea, and to play bridge in the afternoon. And they only the harmless ones!" For Ernest Chateris and Major Vane-Hurst had been classified as nicely by the household as by Lady Malbrook and her friends.

The maid was right in part. Mrs Devereux was

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thinking, but her deductions would have utterly astounded her servants if they could have conceived them behind that quiet exterior. Lily Devereux was not a woman who disguised facts to herself, or avoided facing possibilities. Something in the simplicity of her nature compelled her to honesty, even to herself; and the majority of men and women are least likely to be honest with themselves, or with their God. When her husband's allegiance slipped from her, and other women took her place, Lily had never shut her eyes and clung blindly to the hope that the position was exaggerated. She said, "It is; and I have got to face it." In the same way she had gone to Jewel Errington, and asked for the secret of her success, with a directness that had gained her an answer where a cleverer and more subtle woman must have failed. She faced the situation now with the same singlemindedness, and acknowledged that Teddy Vane-Hurst's statement that he might go to India had been a shock that had opened her eyes to her own feelings. Hitherto she had, quite honestly, regarded him as a friend who was growing dearer every day with their constant intercourse. Now she said, quite as honestly, "I love him." It never occurred to her to disguise the truth, or to take refuge in the excuse that it was a feeling of such recent growth that it might pass. There was no "might" or "possibly" in Lily Devereux's direct gaze at life. While a thing was it had to be dealt with. The chances of the future must take care of themselves.

She faced her own feeling and its consequences as she was driven from her own house to the Malbrooks'. Her feeling once acknowledged, the question to her was simply, What was she going to do? She did not even speculate as to Vane-Hurst's side of the question. That was a danger that might, indeed, be avoided, and she

thought it lay in her own hands. What was she going to do? The words bent a rhythm to the smooth roll of the motor bearing her eastwards, and the short drive between Pont Street and Malbrook House seemed to her long enough to be a wearying repetition of the question.

"What are you going to do? What are you going to do?"

It appeared quite clear to her that the responsibility lay in her hands. She had not studied Teddy for nothing. Any woman who betrayed her heart to him, however silently, was sure of a hearing; his chivalry, his interest, finally the warm impulses of his nature would foredoom him to requite the feeling in some sort. And then?

"What are you going to do?" said the carriage wheels.
"What are you going to do?"

There would be no two paths to such natures as theirs. Again her singlemindedness made it impossible for her even to contemplate him as a lover while still living in her husband's house. Other women might treat love as lightly, and not realise the degradation, but to Lily it was a very sacred thing. If she once surrendered herself into his hands it would be for good and all, and they would go away together. She foresaw that. For herself she did not wait to count the cost, since she had got beyond thinking of herself; but for him! It meant the ending of his career, the loss of his social life for years if not for ever, banishment to some obscure corner of the world, the breaking of family ties which he held very dear. And in return she had only her devotion to offer, and that had failed her once before with another man. In her humility she did not argue that her power as a very ignorant and unformed girl was a very different thing to that of the mature woman, with all her attributes ripened to make her a royal gift. She thought only with

dull pain that she could not bear it for him—it was not enough to exchange.

“What are you going to do?” said the wheels as the brougham stopped before Malbrook House. “What are you going to do?” echoed the great hall as she walked in and gave her wrap to the footman.

The question was not yet answered as she followed the servant upstairs to the historical gallery where Lady Sweetie had appeared naked and unashamed on the night of the political party; it was not quite answered as the door was thrown open before her name—“Mrs Ainslie Devereux”—nor even when she had shaken hands with the small party assembled, most of whom were relations, for it was a family gathering. But it received its answer a few minutes later when Lady Malbrook paused in the midst of a conversation with her brother-in-law, Arthur Beauman, to include the last arrival.

“Yes, this is our very last dinner. All the silver will be packed away after this, so beware! We are leaving town on Thursday. Oh, Lily dear, I hope you mean to accept my invitation, and come down to Plym with me?”

“Yes, thank you very much, Muriel,” said Mrs Devereux composedly. “I have had no time to write, but I shall be quite ready.” And she thought, even as she spoke, of Vane-Hurst’s last speech and his confident tone—“We have plenty of time. You are not going to close your doors to me——” That was the way. To close her doors and slip out of the danger of intercourse—the best and safest way for him, no matter what her own loss. That was what she was going to do.

“How nice of you!” said her cousin. “It will be awfully dull, you know, but George can take you out on the Moor and show you things.” Lady Malbrook always treated Dartmoor as some people do a public entertain-

ment. She expected it to provide distraction for every sort and condition of humanity, no matter how diverse.

"There are plenty of horses," she added with faint malice.

"You will be able to practise your riding."

"I shall be very glad," said Lily simply. "My Riding Master says that what I need now is practice."

"I was at the School this afternoon," said Lady Malbrook carelessly, "watching the children. How very good-looking he is!" and she laughed her fearless little laugh that loved the mere glimpse of danger.

"He is very much in earnest over his profession, and he works hard and conscientiously," said Lily kindly. "I was a very trying pupil at first, but it is coming back to me now—you know I rode as a child. Will you be afraid to mount me, George?"

"Nonsense!" said Lord Malbrook good-humouredly, offering her his arm. "I believe you are capable of flying the worst bank in the county. Do I take Lily down, Firefly? I have no instructions."

"It's just as you like," said Lady Malbrook saucily. "We are off ceremony to-night. Arty, we will take each other."

It was a very pleasant, social dinner-party, but it was always recorded in Lily Devereux's mind by two disturbing elements. One was the frightful headache which had begun to press her brows from the moment she accepted Lady Malbrook's invitation verbally to stay at Plym, the other was a sentence or so dropped quietly into her ear by her host, towards the end of the dinner. He had been talking as much to his left-hand neighbour as to herself throughout the courses, but there arose a question of somebody's finger being double-jointed, which absorbed the attention of the whole dinner-table and left Lily Devereux and her host mentally stranded, while,

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amidst a bubble of laughter, everyone was cracking finger joints and trying to dislocate their thumbs. Under cover of the noisy discussion Lord Malbrook leaned towards Mrs Devereux and spoke very quietly the while he ate his nuts.

"Lily, I heard some news to-day that may interest you."

For the moment it flashed into her brain that he might have been in touch with the Commander-in-Chief, or the Secretary for India, and heard of an appointment. . . . But she forced her eyes to meet his without apprehension, though the pain in her head seemed to reach a crisis. "Yes?" she said courteously.

"Sir Digby Errington is reported to be engaged to his cousin, the widow."

For a minute she looked at him quite collectedly but without understanding anything save that his news did not affect her at all. Then she spoke with a faint reserve :

"I did not know that they were acquainted. Is it really true, do you think?"

"I am afraid—I mean I think it is. The man who repeated it said he had had it from Errington himself. No one has seen much of him lately," he added slowly.

Lily considered for a minute. "Poor little Dulcie Vane-Hurst!" was all she said. "I am very sorry for her if it is so. I heard that her father had raised objections to her engagement, but no one expected this of Digby Errington, did they?"

"No!" he said briefly. "You are sure it affects you in no other way?"

"I am quite sure!" she answered with a composure that was almost repellent.

"Forgive my having mentioned it," he said quietly,

his eyes still on his nuts. "But I thought perhaps it would—interest you to know."

"Only so far as Dulcie is concerned. As for the rest—I have known that that had come to an end for some time," she said quietly.

Lord Malbrook thrust his hand into his great beard in a way which had become historical in Mr Punch's "Essence of Parliament," and pulled it as he did before a division. He did not suffer from curiosity, but he would rather like to have known how Lily Devereux was aware that her husband had broken free of Jewel Errington's toils. Lily's dignified acceptance of the position throughout had kept the scandal so close behind their own doors that a denouement was not much discussed even at clubs where the membership is a mere debating society for social follies; but the rumour of the Errington engagement had come as a revelation. It seemed now that Lily was the least surprised of the public.

"It is only comprehensible by one of two deductions," said Lord Malbrook, as if he summed up the evidence. "Either Errington is a heartless scoundrel, or the woman is possessed of black magic. Her powers for mischief are not canny."

Back on Lily's retentive memory came the little dressing-room at the Riding School, and the splendid, wicked figure at the dressing-table—she saw the mouldering hair and red-lipped face reflected in the glass as if actually before her. It had been in her mind ever since this afternoon, it seemed to her, to mock her with unheeded advice. She almost felt Jewel Errington's dangerous presence near her, goading her to folly, and warning her of temptation—too late.

"She is a very pretty woman, and wonderfully attractive," she said slowly. "I saw her once near enough to

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realise it. I think her power lay in knowing that she had it——”

He raised his head rather quickly, and the nuts dropped from his fingers. But voices broke in from the rest of the table, and the confidence was over. “Do crack your fingers!—George! Lily! Are you double-jointed? Arthur can get his thumb back further than any of us!”

Lord Malbrook obediently spread his great palms for inspection.

“The Beaumans have always been free-handed!” he said resignedly. “But I stop short at dislocation.” He was wondering, as he twisted his knuckles amidst the laughter of the company, where the surprises in feminine human nature would lead if you were not always interrupted upon the brink of discovery. Lily Devereux as a prophet was interesting. He had no further illumination, however, and kept his own counsel even as far as it went.

“George,” said Lady Malbrook that night, from her own room to his unseen presence through a communicating door, “you were getting quite absorbed with Lily Devereux at dinner. If it had been anyone but you I should have suspected a flirtation!”

“Thank you, dear,” said Lord Malbrook meekly.

CHAPTER XV

" Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind,
What need to strive with a life awry ? "

ROBERT BROWNING.

" But I'll ride Feyrie—bonny Bay Feyrie—
I'll ride Feyrie though she kill me ! "

" RIDING DEAR FEYRIE."

PLYM CASTLE is only a castle upon the authority of a ruined tower said to be the sole survivor of a far older building. The present house is set down miles away from the river, and is one of those square, ugly houses which are very general in the West Country, and very comfortable inside whatever they may be out. It is not, strictly speaking, on Dartmoor, being between Roborough and Yelverton, but it serves a double purpose of being within easy distance of the moor and in touch with the civilisation of Plymouth. Three packs of foxhounds, at least, two of harriers, and one of otterhounds, are in its neighbourhood ; but it is a rough country, though the fences may be few and far between, and the shooting is too ungoverned for the sportsman who is tamed to potting. Therefore, as Lady Malbrook lamented, men were not easily available for house parties, and the capacity of Plym was never strained to its utmost for accommodation.

When Lily Devereux arrived there she found a small household, which, however, included Colonel Vane-Hurst

and his daughter. This was a mutual surprise for Mrs Devereux and Miss Vane-Hurst, as Lady Herring had shrewdly supposed, for Lady Malbrook had not thought fit to mention the fact of the other's presence to either of these her guests. Any objection to such propinquity, however, was all on Miss Dulcie's side. It had not occurred to Lily Devereux that her intimacy with Major Teddy would engender a hostile attitude on the part of his family, and her own feeling for Dulcie was one of rather timid sympathy in the knowledge that Lord Malbrook had given her with regard to Digby Errington. She was intensely sorry for the girl, but judging from her own standard she would not have dared to show it, or to do anything but ignore Errington's defection. Her feeling rather prompted her to a greater friendliness for Dulcie, and she was nonplussed to find herself thrust out even to the borders of civility, an undesirable acquaintance who must only be tolerated because Lady Malbrook's lack of consideration had brought them together under the same roof. Lily Devereux's deliberate brain took some time before it could assign the cause of this hostility, and even when she dimly discerned she hardly credited it. Colonel Vane-Hurst, indeed, would have ignored the matter, from the point of view of a man of the world, for, though there had been some talk, it was not a concern of his—at present. But the point of view of extreme youth differs from that of middle-aged experience, and Dulcie championed her ideal of her brother to the verge of absurdity. She almost turned her shoulder to Mrs Devereux after the enforced greeting, and she avoided her as she might contamination so far as the small house party gave her scope.

The girl's unlooked-for attitude gave Mrs Devereux fresh cause for thought. Her life in town had simplified

existence into two personalities—her own and Teddy's—until it had seemed that in the enormous importance of her dawning love smaller things had vanished. But it appeared that the world held other personalities now, implicated in her private experience, and these also must be counted. It confirmed her own decision with regard to Vane-Hurst a little perhaps, but it would not have been the influence to turn the scale in the great strain of renunciation.

If Dulcie could have persuaded her father to leave Plym she would have done so, but he had accepted the Malbrooks' invitation and had no idea of doing what he felt was ridiculous for the sake of a girl's violent prejudice. It did not occur to Lily Devereux to leave, having made her cousin's house a haven of refuge, but she accepted Dulcie's tacit avoidance of her as a small thing compared with the larger issues at stake, and saw as little of her as circumstances permitted. Long rides on the downs with Lord Malbrook filled a large portion of the days, and the world was big enough on Dartmoor to hold a dozen women though they wished to quarrel. The stables of Plym were well supplied with hunters and hacks, but mostly hunters of the true Devon type—big-boned, short-legged animals, with enough power behind the saddle to negotiate the formidable banks of the country, and more stay than pace. Nevertheless they could gallop over rough ground if they could not keep in the first flight in a flying country, and they suited Lily Devereux better than a lighter-built thoroughbred. She rode ten stone, but the Riding Master had seen to it that she could sit correctly, and if her hands were not of the best she had learned to let a horse's mouth alone.

Lord Malbrook approved of her in riding dress.

"She is very solid, but she does not come to bits!"

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he said thoughtfully. "A woman who rides in a tempest of hairpins, with her stock flying like Lord Byron's tie, ought to be banished to the wilds of Ireland. It doesn't matter if your hair comes down there—they call it picturesque!"

"My hair never comes down," said Lady Malbrook instantly. "And that time you are thinking of it had just been washed, and San Toy ran away—you know she did!"

"My *dear* Firefly!" said Lord Malbrook in comical despair, "I wasn't even thinking of you—'pon my soul, I wasn't! I know you think that's impossible, even for your husband, but it's true. And San Toy never bolts," he added soothingly. "She only pulls a bit on the turf."

"Well, you may call that pulling!"—Lady Malbrook was indignant. "But when a horse simply *races*, and you can't stop for *miles*, I call it running away! I don't know why I stuck on—I was like 'Douglas Gordon' in the song," she added with a vexed laugh. "'I flung away my sails, my oars, and rudder!' and clung to her with both hands."

"It was about a hundred yards before you pulled her up," commented Lord Malbrook. "I couldn't think why you suddenly threw your whip down on the Moor, and I know it took me some minutes to find it again."

"It might have taken you more minutes to find *me* if that had gone on!" said Lady Malbrook indignantly. "We won't argue, George—only for heaven's sake don't put Lily on San Toy!"

"Dulcie is going to ride San Toy," said Lord Malbrook quietly. "She is a better weight for her. Lily can have Bay Feyrie."

Lord Malbrook found indeed that his hands were rather

full with two ladies who had no experience of riding on the Moor, and one of whom practically declined to go with the other. Miss Dulcie however really could ride, though she had never hunted, and her host resigned the care of her to his brother and one or two other men who had joined the party, and undertook to pioneer Mrs Devereux himself. She went through the stables with him, and made friends with her mount beforehand, and the grooms liked her for her genuine admiration of the strong-legged bank-jumpers, and their housing. There is no place more pleasant than a well-kept and well-filled stable, particularly if the owner knows a good hunter when he has one and keeps him. I distrust the manners of a horse that is always changing hands as much as I do the man who sells him. Mrs Devereux felt, as Lady Herring did at Tattersall's, that she was among ladies and gentlemen when she went through the loose boxes at Plym, and was greeted by the cheerful sound of munching as some occupant turned his intelligent head and looked at her with great friendly eyes. She found Lord Malbrook in the harness-room as a rule, sitting amongst the glass cases and the saddle-trees, and fighting his grooms on the question of fresh air, which is a point on which many owners and their staff differ, for the men will almost always coddle their charges, and Lord Malbrook believed that, provided it is dry, the temperature of a stable should differ very little from the outside air. The grooms shook their heads over open windows, and confided their grievances to Lily, somewhat to her sympathetic amusement.

"His lordship think San Toy got a cold from keepin' her out of draughts! 'Orses always get a bit of a cough at blackberry time. 'Tweren't the windows."

"Lord Malbrook understands horses, though, doesn't

he ? ” said Lily soothingly. She was standing on the gleaming golden straw with its plaited border, outside the box where Bay Feyrie was objecting to the tightening of girths. The man interjected his conversation with the lady by remarks to the mare as he worked.

“ Yes, his lordship’s a fine horseman—spite of his weight (Stand still, saucy !), goes straight over everything, and you want to get used to our banks.” It is noticeable that the groom people never speak of a rider—he or she is a horseman or a horsewoman. A rider might be seen perched on any inferior article—a bicycle or a camel, for instance.

Mrs Devereux laughed as he led the mare out and offered his hand to mount her. “ I hope I am not going over the banks this morning, Richards,” she said. “ I only want a gallop on the Moor.”

“ You never know where you won’t come on ’em roundabouts,” said Richards drily. “ (Take ’er ’ead, Bill—woa ! my pretty !) Don’t go too fast over the Moor, ma’am. If you don’t know it, it’s full of holes.”

Truthful as the remark was, it was hardly encouraging. Lily found however that with Lord Malbrook to pilot her she avoided the more serious chasms, and enjoyed her riding, though she was unaware until long afterwards that Lord Malbrook had lent her one of his favourite hunters and that her enjoyment was largely due to the perfections of her horse. A child or an M.F.H. could equally well have ridden Bay Feyrie, so perfect were her manners and so great her heart. She was a typical horse for the country, for though she stood over sixteen hands she carried her height so that she looked rather a short-legged horse. The jumping power behind the saddle in those strong quarters, and the slope of her mighty shoulders, were a guarantee for the comfort of the rider

across a country which is broken enough to try the powers of a kangaroo. I am not a Moorsman, and no one but a Moorsman can write of the Dartmoor country ; but I know that it is good company for moods of trouble, as Lily Devereux found. There is room for sorrow in the open air. And though only those born and bred on the Moor are really partakers of its spirit, can translate its drifting mists, and interpret its immense distances, yet even a stranger finds that its space is good for thought, and that mental worry is easier borne between such stretches of earth and sky. Lily Devereux liked it the more in that she was unhappy. The stormy tors suited her mood, and the broken ground was roughly honest. Bay Feyrie was a native, and loved the rough grass and the heather ; in her strong gallop she took broken ditches and sudden banks as no strange horse could have done, and regarded it all as in the day's stride. There is no fair galloping over the Dartmoor country save for those whose minds are so much a map of it that they can pitch their course. Ten yards of grass and a ditch, three more yards and a bank, another twenty and a group of rocks breaking out through the earth to grin at you like a death-trap—so the land may lie. Even on the edges of the great wilderness itself—on Roborough and Yelverton downs—Lily found that she must sit tight and lean back. There was no knowing when the mare would jump, and the cracks in the earth lay behind gorse bushes and down sudden descents of long grass.

Lily had come down to Plym to avoid a crisis, but the crisis in her own mind was not to be avoided. With her saddened knowledge of men it seemed to her likely enough that, once off the edge of the precipice where she and Vane-Hurst had hovered, the whole danger would melt into bright golden mist, for him at least, leaving nothing

but the memory of a friendship—which might have been something more. He would go to India with the thing she feared to hear unspoken, and there it would soon seem to him that such a possibility had never been, even though it had only dawned in his mind. For she feared that some share of her trouble was Teddy's, only she prayed that it might not have become definite to him. Lily faced the fact, with its attendant suffering, that she loved him, but she would willingly have kept all the pain to herself and left him nothing but a sweetened memory. It had come so bewilderingly soon to her that though she had never denied, once she realised it, she had almost hoped that it might not last. Surely, once their constant intercourse was interrupted, the restless longing for his presence would gradually become dulled, and as for him he would find quicker distraction in his wider masculine life. But she found it easier to convince herself within the accustomed walls of her town house than the rarefied air of Roborough Down. I think we do not tell lies to our own souls on such places as Dartmoor. Truth is as naked there and unashamed as are the rocks of its tors.

It chanced that she rode out one morning with her host, and an unusually fine day tempted them to make a day of it. Plym had been favoured with a spell of wet weather of late, and Lily had learned what it means to ride with the wind whipping your face when it is full of rain, and to come home wet all over. To her surprise it had not affected her at all. No one takes any notice of weather in South Devon, the only thing to daunt a sportsman being fog, for fog on the moors is worse than the peasoup of a London November when the traffic is running strong from four roads into the Circus. It was a double pleasure, however, to go out into the dancing morning and to see the world well-washed and

shining after its late bath, with the Moor round the horizon, green and red and brown, and the intervening country spread like a coloured flag before their feet. Overhead the sky was heaped with clouds, and there was still storm on distant tor and head, but sunlight lay on the foreground for miles, and it seemed that the foreground itself was never-ending in its lavish width.

"Are you for a gallop?" said Lord Malbrook. When he rode he tucked his big beard out of the way in an elastic band—a wise precaution, for otherwise it would have flown in his face and blinded him.

Mrs Devereux took up her reins with an unavoidable memory of the Riding Master's earnest voice in her ear. "Keep your right shoulder back, madam, and let your body go with the horse. If a lady sits correctly she can't come off!" As he had said to Miss Dulcie, it was impossible for his pupils to forget his urgent teaching. Something of the personality of the man seemed to haunt them in crucial moments, when his precepts were most necessary.

Bay Feyrie answered the heel touching her side and the loosened rein without any need of the whip. Indeed a word would have found her willing for the gallop. She leapt into her stride almost from her stationary attitude, and outpaced the Devon cob Lord Malbrook was riding in the first twenty yards. It was like a mental tonic—a suggestion of the gallant facing of an enemy—a splendid effort to leave care behind at least. As she put her hands down and dropped her weight well into the saddle, Lily Devereux lost her heartache for the moment, and it seemed blown back from her by the Dartmoor wind that surely came straight out of heaven, it was so fresh and clean from God.

It was only for the moment. We are not to push pain

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from us even in the impatience of our bodily strength. Lily Devereux pulled up at the top of the rise, and found the shadow of Vane-Hurst waiting for her with the love in his eyes that she had never dared to meet. She bent down and patted the mare's neck, sitting still to wait for Lord Malbrook, in the glory of the early autumn day. For the dry summer had tanned the earth's face with sunburn, and though the heather was not yet out the gorse was flaming all around and underfoot, and August looked like late September, for the harvest had been hurried in before the weather broke. A flight of rooks was cawing overhead, and mingling with them came the mournful cry of a covey of plovers. The birds and Lily Devereux and the little rough Dartmoor ponies had the world to themselves for a moment, but she shared the solitude with the shadow of Vane-Hurst, and it grew a certainty in her mind from that moment that her mental life was always to be shared by him, though Fate might divide their bodily presence from this hour. In the joy of the scene before her—in the grief of future troubles—his relentless memory would be at her side, to remind her of what they might have had in common, and the spiritual communion that was denied to her. She accepted the fiat as one too certain even for resignation.

"If you like, we won't go home to lunch—we can get some at an inn out Walkhampton way," said Lord Malbrook as he joined her. "Or we might get on to Yennadon. It will probably be eggs and bacon of the greasiest description, unless it is cheese and marmalade. Do you mind?"

"Not at all," she answered amicably. "I do not feel as if I wanted to go home for a very long time."

"The horses will disagree with you presently! But they can have a rest at Yennadon. Feyrie goes well, eh?"

She was out at grass till the week before we came down, but she is getting the fat off her."

"Why is she called Feyrie—is it an old-fashioned word for fairy? Because I think her ill-named if so. She is far too substantial!"

"Oh dear, no. Feyrie has a more sinister meaning. It comes from 'fey' the Scotch word that means a curious levity before misfortune."

"I don't quite understand."

"Have you never felt curiously gay—almost light-headed—yet with a presentiment of evil overtaking you?"

She looked at him steadily for a moment, while all last season's experience surged back over her mind. Had she been "fey" with the tragedy of real love before her? Was that what Lord Malbrook meant? She had almost suspected him of late of knowing her inward mind. Yet his face was merely the kindly one she knew, bent on her, while the wind blew his big silken beard in a comical streamer despite its confinement in the elastic band.

"Poor Feyrie!" was all she said.

"She was really called after a horse in a ballad—'Riding dear Feyrie'—but the animal in question was a brute with that touch of the half inhuman about her that the old ballad makers loved to insert." And he began half-humming the words:

"I'll ride Feyrie—bonny Bay Feyrie—
I'll ride Feyrie though she kill me!"

Mrs Devereux looked up with a curious recklessness in her eyes. "I can understand a horseman going willingly to such a death!" she said unexpectedly.

"The hero of the ballad is a child," returned Lord

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Malbrook drily, "for the old servitor with whom the inevitable argument takes place, says :

' Little hands are weak hands
At thirteen years—'

and again :

' What were you doing—
And your lady mother rueing !
Riding Bay Feyrie to your death ? ' "

" Feyrie—this Feyrie—is a darling, anyhow," said Mrs Devereux with a little obstinate smile. " Have you hunted her ? "

" Oh yes. I was down here for a few weeks last winter, and she got some real work then. At this time of the year we can only get a day or so's cubbing, and Firefly hates Plym later on. Cubhunting will be early this year, as the farmers got their harvest in so soon. We must try to have a day for you."

" Do you think I could hunt ? "

" Certainly. There is no jumping on the Moor, you know—it is only galloping over rough ground. If you sit tight, and let Feyrie do the work, she'll take charge of you."

" I seem to have missed a great deal of enjoyment," said Mrs Devereux looking down thoughtfully at the mare's strong shoulders as they descended another slope of grass and struck into a track that led apparently up into the sky beyond Brent Tor. " But it never seemed to come my way. Feyrie is making me sorry now."

" My dear Lily, if you wait for enjoyment to come your way you will be found on Doomsday sitting by the roadside crying, because the angels have forgotten you ! Don't you know that the reason of this world's existence at all is to teach us to make our own opportunities ? "

"I always thought it was to teach us to endure with patience!"

"I think your experience has been hard on you," said Lord Malbrook very kindly. He was in secret extremely sensitive for anything feminine, and the chivalry dormant in his nature made him even rather prejudiced in favour of women. His wife, who took advantage of it, had really a sounder judgment of her sex. "But after all the road is never at its worst all the way. If it's rough here it will smooth over presently."

"There are various kinds of bad roads, aren't there?" said Mrs Devereux a little bitterly. "Rough ground is sometimes safer than smooth turf, if the latter hides a bog."

She thought he looked at her quickly, but she did not greatly care. At this point in her life small considerations, such as the opinions of other people, were blotted out by the big thing that had to be faced. It proved how small in comparison had been her husband's desertion, in that she had never forgotten the prying eyes of the world at large, and had at least fortified herself against them.

The luncheon turned out to be cold bacon after all, but the bread and butter were too good to be scorned, and there was Devonshire cyder to drink. They rested for an hour, for they had left Yennadon far behind, and pushed out as far as Walkhampton Common, and then rode home by way of Sparkatown and Harrowbeer, the horses' hoofs ringing cheerily on the good roads, for they knew that they were going home. The ride ended with a last glorious gallop over the grass up to the very gates of Plym, shining in the low afternoon light, nor did it occur to Lily Devereux that her fate had materialised behind them, and awaited her with tea in the comfortable square hall where Lady Malbrook generally sat in preference to

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the drawing-rooms. Even the fresh track of a motor up the drive meant nothing to her mind but the disadvantage of guests when she was honestly tired, and she decided to excuse herself under plea of changing her habit, and lie down for an hour before she dressed for dinner.

"Who has driven over, I wonder?" said Lord Malbrook as they turned in at the stableyard. "That car is hired, or I am very much mistaken, from Plymouth. Lily, do you mind dismounting here? The horses are rather apt to object to motors."

"Not at all," Mrs Devereux said, and jumped down as soon as the groom took her horse. She kissed the star on Bay Feyrie's forehead and offered her sugar, but the mare was keen for her stable, and only sniffed at the proffered dainty. Lily was laughing at her own rebuff as she followed Lord Malbrook back to the house and through the outer doors to the inner hall.

On the threshold, as it were, she paused, and the blood leapt back to her heart, making it hammer in her ears. There was a cheerful hum of conversation going on, and the jingle of teacups. Lady Malbrook was laughing, and Arthur Beauman was chatting loudly to the company at large. Even Colonel Vane-Hurst was more animated than usual, and the only person who did not seem in her best spirits was Miss Dulcie, whose angry eyes met Mrs Devereux's first of all as she entered. But the girl's accentuated hostility passed the woman by as in a dream, for another voice was mingling with the familiar tones of the house party, and a pair of broad shoulders that were dangerously familiar blocked Mrs Devereux's view of everything else. The next moment Major Vane-Hurst had turned round and was shaking hands with her.

"Have you been the other side of the Moor?" he

asked in his softer tones—it seemed to her that his voice had gained an unusual softness to her jarred and alarmed nerves—"Lady Malbrook said you had gone out this morning for a short ride, and we have been expecting you in ever since."

"We lunched out near Walkhampton Common," explained Lord Malbrook mercifully, for Lily Devereux could not speak for the instant. "Where have you dropped from, Teddy?"

"I came from Plymouth. I am putting up at the Grand, and ran over to look up Dulcie."

"And the rest of us," said Lord Malbrook quietly.

"And the rest of you. Lady Malbrook has asked me to dine, if you will excuse my dressing."

"Certainly—I could lend you a shooting coat that might fit you, but I blush to think where my trousers would come on your legs!" said Lord Malbrook quizzically. "Won't you have some tea, Lily? The bacon was not at all satisfying, was it?"

"I will go and change, I think. I feel so hot and dirty after being out all day," said Mrs Devereux collectedly. "Will you send me some tea to my room, Muriel—if you don't mind?"

"No, certainly—of course. Poor dear! you must be tired. George, you ought not to take Lily so far," said Lady Malbrook a little effusively, for her conscience was not quite at rest. And like all people who are assailed by an inward monitor she had an impulse to justify herself by an outward attention to the person wronged.

Vane-Hurst crossed the hall with one of his long strides and opened the door for Mrs Devereux that led to the staircase and the upper portion of the house. She did not look up at him, even as she said "Thanks!"

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but her hand closed a little convulsively on her riding whip and she wondered dully at herself.

"Are you really tired?" he said below his breath.

"Don't hide in your room all the evening, will you?"

"I shall come down to dinner," she said quietly.

"Why?"

"I have come all this way to see you!" he answered, and there was something a little fierce in the insistence.

"I must see you—I want to talk to you."

She did not reply. Only her heart went down and down as she climbed the stairs to her room, and they seemed endless to her leaden feet. Perhaps she was really tired from her ride, but her mind had fallen to a hopeless mood, and she asked herself despairingly why Vane-Hurst had done this thing and made her sacrifice and the pain already borne of no avail! She had written to him before she left town, a letter so carefully worded that he could regard it as a conventional farewell, if he so chose, or a mere courtesy to round off a friendship that had come quite naturally to an end. She dared not be more explicit. So long as the thing went unconfessed she could bear her own part and pray that she had inflicted none of the pain on him. The future was bad enough to face with this yearning, unsatisfied and unacknowledged, to be endured day by day. But now it seemed as if with a man's brutal directness he had decreed that the tragedy should be played out to its finish. He "wanted to talk to her"—wanted the explanation she had agonised to spare him. It is one of the burdens laid on women that they should so often suffer uselessly beforehand for an object that their mankind ruthlessly trample underfoot, and render unavailing their travail.

After a while her maid brought her some tea, and she threw herself down on her bed after drinking it and tried

to rest. But that disturbing presence downstairs pervaded the sanctity even of her own room, and her nerves jumped with an unwonted shock to remember that he was so near, and to recall the sudden picture of him standing in the centre of the group as she had entered. For the first time she could not see her way clearly to what she must do. Hitherto it had seemed simple, but then she had only herself with whom to reckon. Now there was Vane-Hurst, and she knew that he intended to drive her into the crisis she had so far avoided—perhaps he had even planned to charge the subject in headlong fashion at the first opening, and was lurking somewhere downstairs in wait for her. She gasped a little as her maid dressed her, and hardly noticed that the woman had chosen a black gown for her to wear, and arranged her hair a little more softly and loosely than usual. All this was in deference to Lily's white face, and a certain air of tire about her that the maid put down to her long ride; even servants, the shrewdest analysts, rarely assigned mental causes to Lily Devereux.

All that Mrs Devereux saw, as she surveyed herself in the glass, was that she was so perfectly finished as to allow her no excuse for lingering upstairs, and that she was due in the drawing-room. The Malbrooks tried to dine at eight o'clock while at Plym, but they were in the clutches of an old family butler, as much part of the castle as its wine-cellars, and he rarely allowed them any food until half-past. It was ten minutes past the hour as Lily left her room, but the gong had not sounded, and she descended the stairs with an even more lagging foot than she had ascended them.

She entered the drawing-room to find it empty, and a breath of real relief lifted the rope of pearls on her breast. But she had forgotten the ante-room, which might well

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be termed an ambush, and the swish of her gown had barely crossed the floor before a hand swung the curtains of the further doorway, and her fear took visible shape before her.

"I thought you would be down early," said Vane-Hurst as he came up to her side. He spoke quietly, but there was something ominous in the restraint. "How is your head?"

"Better, thanks. I have been lying down. I did not know that it was early—it is past eight."

"Malbrook ought not to have let you ride so far. I shall take better care of you."

"You!" she echoed, dismayed.

"Yes—won't you ride with me? Surely you are not going to run away the minute I arrive! That would be a confession of weakness." His voice was half caressing and half teasing. It appeared to her that by some inverse process they had advanced a stage since she left town, even without communication.

"But you—are not staying here!" she said feebly.

"That's nothing—a motor brings me over in half-an-hour or so, and Malbrook won't refuse to mount me at least. I shall come over to see Dulcie——" he laughed significantly. "Of course!"

"Then I think you had better ride with her."

He moved impatiently. "I cannot be hampered with children!"

"She will be very disappointed——"

"I would rather disappoint her than you!" he said, with sudden triumph. "Don't tell me that you would not be disappointed—I shall not believe you."

"Then it is obviously no use my speaking," she said with studied indifference as she turned away. Then she saw that she had made a mistake, for he followed her,

pressed upon her, and she started to feel his presence so overwhelmingly near.

"Why did you write me that letter?" he said in a lower tone.

"Because I thought it a courtesy due to a friend," she returned calmly, wondering how long her nerve would stand this strain. "I could not have left town without telling you I was going and saying good-bye."

"You knew I should not have said good-bye so. You hinted that we might not meet again, as I was going to India, but you knew that no man who was a man would let you slip away from him like that!"

"I think," she said with slow wonder in her voice, "that I have known very little of men!"

"You must have, if you think that you can raise hopes to make us mad, and then that you will not be followed when you run away."

"Run away!" she echoed, a little shocked. It made her stumbling effort on a hard road seem puerile and childish—it almost reduced her to the level of a very young girl startled by a first love affair. "I assure you I did not run away," she said with dry humour. "I took the eleven o'clock train from Paddington and proceeded leisurely across England in response to Lady Malbrook's invitation!"

"Nevertheless you were running away—you ran away from me," he insisted, and she knew that his keen eyes were watching her intently even though she had never risked meeting them. "I was not at all depressed or resigned when I got your letter, as you meant me to be—I was elated!"

She did not answer. It had been on the tip of her tongue to feign ignorance, to say she did not understand, that he was talking nonsense—all of which are legitimate

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feminine weapons to repulse an attack. But the utter uselessness of such subterfuge swept over her heart and made her dumb. She must suffer all things, even to the bitter end, if he so decreed it.

Her silence seemed so like defeat that in an instant he had flung nearer, and the broadcloth of his sleeve actually touched her arm and made her shiver.

"Don't run away from me," he said in a quick repressed fashion that terrified her. "It is no use—I have you without touching you!"

But though he was master of himself the touch threatened her. She felt it nearer, an unknown thing that she had never experienced even in her married life. Her will deserted her as never before, and she stood helpless upon the brink of the precipice of passion. As she raised her eyes in appeal against the mysterious power he exerted she caught sight of their two figures in a large oval mirror, and the sight held her spellbound. Despite the familiarity of our own images we forget them when not expecting them in the glass, and the sudden confronting of ourselves will frequently be like meeting a stranger, essentially so in moments of strong feeling. Lily Devereux saw herself as a tall woman in black with a white face she did not know, and bending over her a man at whom she shrank from looking. The expression in the two faces was too intense, too fierce with life to justify a spectator. She was really frightened at the revelation they presented and nearly cried out. In a second, however, the sound had died in her throat, for into the mirror had come a third figure—she did not recognise whose, but the added presence of a girl in white altered the situation like a flash of lightning. She drew the conventional veil over her features like a mask, and had seen it there even as she turned to face Miss Dulcie.

"Oh!" said the girl shortly, stopping in her turn as if she also were thrown out of her self-possession by her intrusion. "I thought you called out, Mrs Devereux!"

"I saw you suddenly in the mirror, and did not recognise you," said Lily truthfully. "It startled me. I think I did exclaim."

"Did you think I was a ghost?" said Dulcie with an odd little laugh. It sounded a little insolent, a little incredulous. "I don't know why my coming into the room should startle you else!"

"You are not much like a ghost," retorted Vane-Hurst, with an abruptness that was very unlike his usual indulgence to his sister. "There are no illusions about you."

It was not so much the sentence, even with the emphasis on the last word, as the savagery of the tone that made both the feminine things near him shrink. Mrs Devereux's grave eyes held reproach but no fear. Miss Dulcie flushed an angry crimson, and then her eyes sparkled with tears of mortification and hurt affection. She was a spoilt child with a warm heart, and Major Teddy had reached her on both vulnerable points.

"You are down very early," she said curtly to Mrs Devereux, the resentment in her transparent face so obvious that the older woman could hardly ignore it. She was slow to take offence, or to realise that there was any cause of offence in herself, but it was being forced home to her at last by the girl's hostility, and she found herself face to face with a new complication, in Dulcie's jealousy.

"I went to my room early," she replied almost as curtly, and sat down idly by a table with some illustrated papers which she began to turn over until the rest of the party appeared.

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It was a trying dinner, worse than the last she had had with the Malbrooks in town, Mrs Devereux thought. Vane-Hurst was too far off from her for any communication between them, and she could hear him carrying on a conversation with the pretty daughter of a neighbouring squire in a perfectly normal manner. Her own attention was claimed by Arthur Beauman, who questioned her as to the day's excursion, and she answered him collectedly ; but Miss Dulcie's youth stood her in no such stead as their experience, and she was so unhappy as to be silent, drawing an unwelcome attention to herself from the rest of the table.

"Dulcie's lost her tongue!" said Colonel Vane-Hurst rallyingly. "Come! Wake up, Mischief. Who has succeeded in silencing the chatterbox? I'll give him a fiver for the secret!"

"Let her alone—she is thinking how to get out of going cubbing!" said Lord Malbrook quizzically. "San Toy was too much for her to-day, and she's afraid of disgracing us all on the Moor."

"There's a meet on Saturday, isn't there?" put in Arthur Beauman, catching the conversation with passing interest. "We shall have to get up in the small hours, I suppose."

"Six o'clock," said Lord Malbrook cheerfully. "Very moderate for the first of the cubbin'. Lily would sit up all night rather than miss it."

"I shall eat my breakfast over-night," said Mrs Devereux with some spirit. "You are not going to frighten me, George, so long as I may ride Bay Feyrie."

"Where is the meet?" Vane-Hurst asked, down the table.

"At Whitchurch. We shall get the best of the galloping ground on the Moor. Are you coming, Teddy?"

"If you'll find me a gee."

"There's an Irish mare in the stable who will carry you all right. She's a bit queer in her temper, mind—has a trick of jumping clean off the ground with all four feet."

But horses could not daunt Major Teddy, so long as they were up to his weight. He put aside Lady Malbrook's protest that he must rise in the middle of the night to come out from Plymouth in time, and began to discuss the advantages of motoring straight to Whitchurch, or training to Horrabridge,

"Better motor," said Lord Malbrook. "I'll send the horses on before. And please bring a little beeswax from Plymouth with you to fix Dulcie in her saddle," he added, returning to the rally of his first victim.

But the girl took his nonsense with unwonted temper. "I wish you would all of you let me alone!" she said almost querulously. "I've got a headache. I shall go to bed after dinner—if you'll excuse me, Lady Malbrook."

"Certainly, dear," said her hostess, a trifle irritated in her turn. "Really, if Dulcie is going to be so uncertain in her moods as this, I won't have her another time," she said to Lord Malbrook later. "All the Vane-Hursts are bad-tempered, but I thought the girl was too young to show it yet."

"I don't think it was temper," said Lord Malbrook thoughtfully. "I think someone had pulled the curb a bit too hard!"

"What do you mean, George? I wish you could leave the stable behind you sometimes and speak like a Christian instead of a groom!"

"Ain't grooms Christians?" said Lord Malbrook meekly. "I'm sure the whole establishment turns out dutifully every Sunday, and puts enough grease on its hair

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to oil the pew backs ! All I meant was that Dulcie has probably signified her disbelief in her brother's visits being to herself—an unforgivable thing from her point of view, if you come to think of it—and Teddy has told her to mind her own business."

"Do you think so?" said Lady Malbrook with quickened interest. "I never connected her silly behaviour with that. One couldn't judge anything from Teddy and Lily themselves to-night, could one?"

"Perhaps there wasn't anything to judge," said Lord Malbrook gently. "Let's be charitable, Firefly, and give Lily Devereux the credit of steering a straight course, even if Teddy is a bit of an ass. There is no need for us to lose our heads, like Dulcie, and translate a perfectly natural visit into a chandestine appointment."

But he had not seen, as Miss Dulcie had, two figures before a long mirror, or surmised the crucial moment in which she had suddenly found herself.

CHAPTER XVI

"I said—Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all my life seemed meant for, fails,
 Since this was written and needs must be—
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
Only a memory of the same.
— And this beside, if you will not blame,
 Your leave for one more last ride with me."

ROBERT BROWNING.

VANE-HURST had obtained his leave with some difficulty, for the manœuvres were not yet over, and it is against the principles of generals to give leave during that strenuous period. Had he not been detailed in orders to serve on a special committee it is probable that he would have only got two days at the most ; as it was he had scooped a week, and swore because he wanted a fortnight. With India in the immediate future it behoved him to make quick progress in settling his affairs, both mental and physical, in England ; and he had come straight down to Devonshire with a precipitation that was entirely characteristic. So long as his object was unattained he would not risk the least chance ; and he decided that to motor out to Whitchurch on the hunting morning was, after all, to lose the advantage of riding with Lily Devereux to the meet, and possibly catching her alone at Plym. Lord Malbrook had decided that his own party had better jog quietly out to Whitchurch,

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the nearest point for training being Yelverton, and Major Teddy decided to join them and ride out also.

When he arrived at Plym in the dawn of a hunting morning on the prescribed Saturday, he found that a mild domestic whirlpool had altered some of the arrangements. Lord Malbrook had been forced to take a week-end in town, sorely against his inclinations, owing to some extraordinary naughtiness on the part of Lady Sacharissa Beauman which threatened consequences too grave to be dealt with at a distance. Details were not yet to hand, but incoherent letters from her nurses and a certain Agnes Beauman, a cousin of Lord Malbrook, had so worried the long-suffering parents that Lord Malbrook had at last felt bound to take the tiresome journey and had run up to town overnight.

When Major Vane-Hurst's motor snorted its way into the square court of the stables the delicate light of an autumn morning was beginning to reveal the world in all its dewy freshness—shyly, as if half afraid of the beauty of earth, yet so distinctly that each line of the old grey stone house seemed probed with light. Major Teddy rubbed his hands, for he was cold from a journey begun in the dark, and stamped off to the house, where in the hall he met Arthur Beauman and learned of Lord Malbrook's departure.

"You and I are in charge of the party," said Beauman ruefully. "I'll see to your sister if you can manage Mrs Devereux—too bad of George! He promised to pilot her."

"I wonder he went. It is probably some stupid scare of the nurses," said Vane-Hurst, but his tone was by no means dissatisfied at his host's absence.

"Muriel made him go. It seems that Sweetie has done it this time—nearly killed another child, or some-

thing really serious. They ought to keep her on bread and water and beat her once a day at least!" said Sweetie's uncle fervently. "Nothing else would exorcise the demon in her. Have a whisky and milk, Teddy?" he broke off with a return to more natural hospitality. "The ladies are not down yet."

Major Teddy accepted, and warmed the chilled blood in his veins while waiting. It had been cold driving over Crown Hill and across Roborough, and even his robust vitality felt it. He watched the doorway however as a cat might a mouse-hole, even with the glass at his lips, and the sound of light feet echoing on the stairs without made him set it down abruptly.

"Well, Dulcie, booted and spurred for the fray?" he said carelessly, stooping to kiss his sister as she entered, a slim little figure alert with excitement and as trim as a first-rate ladies' tailor could make her. "It's a bore Malbrook had to leave," he added, as he stepped forward quickly to shake hands with Mrs Devereux. "But I am in luck!" he added for her ears alone.

She looked up at him as if a little startled. "I am to pilot you in his place!" he said.

"You'll look after me, of course, Teddy!"—Miss Dulcie's voice came sharply across the hall as if she divined the inaudible words by instinct.

"By Jove! there won't be much looking after anybody once hounds get away on the Moor!" said Beauman, laughing. "You'll have to follow, that's all. Is this all the party, Mrs Devereux?"

"Lady Malbrook would not come. Mr Lascelles and Captain Hawtry have gone on, I think," said Lily with unusual hesitation. Dulcie Vane-Hurst's mental attitude worried her, and Lord Malbrook's absence seemed like Fate.

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Yet there could hardly be a chance of explanations, or the crisis she dreaded, on a morning when they were all going cubbing, and she felt comparatively safe once she was on Bay Feyrie's back, jogging comfortably along in the virgin air, though Teddy Vane-Hurst might be close beside. The Irish mare which Lord Malbrook had promised should carry him was a huge roan beast of such proportions that even Major Teddy looked suitably mounted. She had plenty of bone for all her lean head and well-bred quarters, and she evinced the tendency of which Lord Malbrook had spoken very early in the day's proceedings, by objecting to the big gates of Plym and jumping sideways, all four feet at once, in a manner to land most horsemen on their backs. Major Teddy hit her with unmoved temper, and drove her in pursuit of the party; but by the time he reached them they had joined the two extra men who had gone in advance, and Mrs Devereux was riding and chatting with Captain Hawtry, late of the Lancers—a warrior as tenacious in his methods as Major Teddy himself.

The cavalcade strung out towards the Moor, leaving Yelverton behind them and plunging down a steep lane to Horrabridge, where they touched the railway and fell in with the first of the trains bringing other hunters out from Plymouth. Even Bay Feyrie objected to a rush and roar over the bridge above her head, and signified the same by a sudden plunge and the prettiest curvetting down the road to the village. Mrs Devereux checked her easily enough, but Miss Dulcie, who was riding more carelessly, allowed San Toy to get hold of her bit and bolt for a hundred yards. Now was Vane-Hurst's opportunity. The roan was so obviously a handful that he shouted out to Captain Hawtry with some show of reason.

" Ride after my sister and see that she's all right, will you ? I expect she'll pull the brute up before she gets to the street." #

Hawtry spurred forward, but cautiously, to avoid making the runaway still worse. Beauman and Lascelles had dropped behind. It seemed as if the Irish mare suddenly quieted down—or was Major Teddy a better tactician than could have been guessed ? — for she abandoned her cantrips and fell in beside Mrs Devereux with only an occasional jingle of the bit as she reached for the double snaffle.

" You pulled up your horse very well," said Vane-Hurst approvingly.

" I am so frightened about your sister ! Ought you not to ride after her ? "

" I sent Hawtry. This animal would have broken into a gallop, and then Dulcie's horse might have met with an accident. It was her own fault for not thinking of what she was doing—she is like that ! Look ! There they are ! "

The runaway was walking quietly enough now over the little bridge with the pointed arches that artists so love to paint, and up the steep street to the right. Captain Hawtry kept in attendance, and the party proceeded in this order up another lane, steeper than before, and under high hedges where the blackberries were fast ripening. The sun was up by now, and beginning to warm the riders gently where his beams penetrated through the leafy lane. Despite the mental depression on her, Lily Devereux felt her animal spirits rise with the joy of the motion and the morning. She leaned down and patted the mare's neck, with that little grateful thrill that besets riders for the good horse under them.

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"You are to follow me to-day," Vane-Hurst said in his lordliest manner. "Try to see where I am, even when we are galloping, and I will give you a lead. You might get into rough places otherwise."

"I think you ought——" She hesitated, the revelation of Dulcie's angry eyes returning to her mind. "You ought to look after your sister——"

"Arthur Beauman will do that—or Lascelles. They will be only too pleased."

"But she asked you!"

"Look here," he said, turning in his saddle to look down on her, for, big horse as Bay Feyrie was, and big woman as Mrs Devereux, they stood under the Irish mare and Vane-Hurst—"Look here, I am going to look after you, and no one else—you are my property, for to-day at least, and it is no use protesting."

Her heart leaped to the menace—only too gladly. This was what she had been asking all her life, the struggle for conquest without hope of quarter. She knew the almost hostile look in his eyes without meeting them, and turned her own away to the dewy hedges—nut and blackberry and hawthorn—sparkling in the radiant mist. All the world was morning, and her life new-risen for her. Oh, but it would be hard to turn her back on the wonder that was but just beginning, when the time came! I think that Guinevere and Lancelot wandered into lawless rapture under much the same conditions—the young world that is never so young as when we see it from the saddle, the quickened life in human veins thrilling with some subtle communication to the live motion of the horse. Mrs Devereux dropped her whiphand with an instinctive movement to Feyrie's strong shoulder, asking sympathy. The mare turned her head instantly and snuffed her rider's foot. That was the real under-

standing between feminine things ; though what Lily Devereux said to the man was : " Don't be arbitrary."

" I have to snatch my rights from you ! " he declared.

" Rights !— "

" Yes, by the colour in your face now—and you would control your blood too, if you could—by every look you won't give me, and every word you have prevented my saying ! When you ran away from me you ran straight into danger."

The possible truth found her tongue-tied. Yet she had done it for the best, and it seemed impossible to her that any woman with honesty of purpose could fail. She allowed the accusation to drop into the beauty of the young morning, and a minute later the steep lane had lifted clean out on to the Moor, and the couple in front turned in their saddles for a consultation.

" They must be over there somewhere. Any idea what coverts they will draw, Arthur ? "

Beauman rode up and looked round the horizon doubtfully. On all sides the world had suddenly opened out into rough green and deeper brown, and beyond on the skyline purple sweeps of the great wilderness ; but there was no sign of the hounds.

" Chance for it ! " he said, and rode forward, the others closing in behind him. Miss Dulcie indeed had to rein back, for after her late exploit San Toy was inclined to bolt again when she felt the turf. A rough piece of ground to canter over, a bit of bank to jump, and a rolling hillside before them, opened simultaneously with an exclamation from Lascelles—

" There they are ! "

" Look out ! " said Vane-Hurst quickly as he shot past Mrs Devereux. " She'll pull when she sees hounds, most likely."

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Lily dropped her heel, thrusting her foot forward in the stirrup iron, and held herself firmly in the saddle, almost without realising how well the Riding Master had grounded her. Nor did it even shift her seat when the mare took a dry watercourse in her stride, and landed safe on the further side. Her spirits rose with her own success, and she thought of the ballad Lord Malbrook had quoted :

“ I'll ride Feyrie—bonny Bay Feyrie !—
I'll ride Feyrie though she kill me ! ”

Hounds were already at work when the Plym Castle party arrived on the scene, and only a very limited number of enthusiasts had risen early enough to have gathered on the Moor. Two or three typical farmers on horses bred by themselves—and we want more such men and cattle in this England of to-day !—a few well-known residents from neighbouring villages such as they had passed through, Horrabridge and Yelverton and Whitchurch folk, and several children astride ponies that were by no means the quietest mounts that morning. Lily was occupied with the children to the exclusion of the rest of the world, save that she observed with some puzzlement two men on rough Dartmoor ponies of the sorriest appearance.

“ Will those people on the Dartmoors follow ? ” she asked Arthur Beauman with some uncertainty.

“ Bless your heart, yes ! Keenest sportsmen of the lot. (Good-morning, Mr Pengelly !) There's the air of a family party about these meets. Everyone knows the farmers, and speaks to 'em.”

“ Yes, but there are farmers and farmers ! ” laughed Mrs Devereux. “ The man on the fidgety horse, whose face is like a rising sun, is unmistakable ; but that person

on the pony whom you have just addressed is such a very ragged specimen ! ”

“ Ragged or not, they are the men who own the land. And if you want foxes or hares you had best be civil.”

A cubbing morning is always a more sociable affair than the regular fixtures of the real season, for even supposing that hounds get away they will not run far, and more often they are sent back to teach the cubs to move as soon as they hear the tufters, but are not allowed to kill. The Whitchurch pack were harriers, but would hunt foxes as well, should they get on the line of one, and it seemed that morning that several had been seen about and they were on to one before the master decided to put them back. It all seemed to happen in an instant ; for people were standing about, chatting, speaking of the condition of the horses and altering a curb or a leather—and suddenly across the laughing day came the raw sound of the horn, and that plaintive whimper for blood which struck Lily Devereux with a little chill in the perfect, sunny morning. Somebody said, “ They’re off ! ” as if it were a race, and on the left a stream of black and tan and white was flickering through the long grasses, over the side of the hill, the master and whip like a rearguard. It was not good going—Mrs Devereux’s heart beat a little quicker as the bay mare snatched at the bit and sprang straight into a long easy gallop, but before her a length ahead went the Irish roan, Vane-Hurst sitting down in his saddle as if he meant business. It was such a familiar scene to him as to be merely technical, but it struck Mrs Devereux as it might a child the first time of going out, or someone, a Colonist, perhaps, who though used to the saddle has never seen the English ideal sport. Even in the breathlessness of the first rush she was aware of other things besides the

details that go to make up the sport of a hunting morning. It was less important than she had imagined it even with danger to spice it and a real sense of insecurity as the field rushed down the hillside, not so dignified somehow as she had felt it afoot—twenty horses or so scuttering after a string of waving tails, twenty riders with intent faces and alert eyes, going, heaven knows! as reckless of life as if the hillside were not full of trap-holes, and all led by one small fox-cub turning and twisting these giants to his own size, as easily as a child does puppets on a string. This was not by any means the right mood in which to go hunting, and she struggled against it; but the impression intruded itself that, for all the seriousness of sport to the English, she and the other riders were trivial. Perhaps the immense size of the Moor dwarfed the sense of the proceedings. In a smaller country one sees the hunt well staged by the limit of field and woodland, and men and horses and hounds loom larger, and fill the foreground; but look at a small number of people hunting over the Moors, and the proportions extend the other way—it is the Moor which fills the world, and reduces humanity and its little businesses to the level of details.

As the ground grew more level the horses sobered to a more uniform pace. The stream of white and black and tan ran in and out through the grass like a snake, the pace slowed, and someone passing Mrs Devereux said, "Hounds are hunting very prettily!" Yes, that was it—it looked a pretty sport, unsuited to serious things, until suddenly arose that whimper again—the blood-call through the peaceful morning. Then it seemed an anomaly, to bring the extraordinary tragedy of death among so much vitality as filled the living world. There was something uncouth in the cry of "Hark for'ard!—For'ard!—For'ard!" the cracking of whips and the people looking

neither to right nor left, straining on for the elementary purpose of taking one puny life.

The check had only been momentary, the pace quickened again, and before the broken ground revealed it the pack were upon water, over and through it, streaming away in another direction. Vane-Hurst was abreast with Mrs Devereux for one moment before they jumped, and shouted back to her—"Look out, Lily!"—which was a wicked thing to say, for the first use of her Christian name in his mouth coming at such a moment might well have startled her into a blunder. As it was her heart leaped with her horse, and it seemed to her that Bay Feyrie sprang straight into the air, bringing her rider back with a jerk as they landed. It was not a workman-like performance, but the mare had jumped big and perhaps it was creditable that Mrs Devereux had kept her seat in the suddenness of the movement. She forgot to be afraid because of the mental excitement that possessed her, and was far more breathless from the new stage marked by the hearing of her name than from the gallop. A stealthy, reckless joy filled her veins in following him, and the very chance of risk made it all the sweeter.

Vane-Hurst was leading, and the bulk of the riders had begun to take the same line, recognising a horseman. The roan outpaced the smaller horses, even with the weight of the big man on her back, and behind came the sunburnt farmer on the young black, another man on a raking chestnut, and Mrs Devereux. Behind Mrs Devereux again there were some ten or twelve, more or less indifferently mounted. Suddenly, before he could avoid it, Vane-Hurst had led them into danger; a clump of gorse through which they were riding over-hung a veritable hole, a place like a miniature chalk-pit with broken sides. Lily Devereux saw the roan gather herself to-

gether and, pulled round to the left, take it at its narrowest, for there was no hesitation about Teddy. Then it seemed to her that they were all almost on top of each other—the farmer lifting his black as cleanly as Teddy had done the roan, the rider on the chestnut wheeling sharp to the right. She had time to check Feyrie, scramble through, not over, and striking firm ground the other side gallop on again. But a terror seized her in remembrance of the children, and could she have pulled up she would have done so. When hounds checked again she turned abruptly to see the havoc she had imagined, and was amazed to find the remnant behind her still mounted and apparently unmoved.

“By Jove, Teddy! You nearly let us into it that time,” said Beauman, joining them as they eased their steaming horses. “That was an awful moment. I thought we were down.”

“Yes, I didn’t see it, you know,” said Vane-Hurst amicably. “Did you get over all right, Mrs Devereux?”

“Oh yes!” Lily was surprised to find herself as indifferent as he. “But I thought of the children—I wanted to look behind me——”

“It was a scrum for a moment,” Beauman said, laughing. “Everyone on the top of the other. We take our chances on the Moor, eh, Mr Hard?”

The farmer was sitting near by on his black horse, and looked round with a twinkle in his eye. “They call this an easy country,” he said. “Well, this is the cream of the galloping ground.”

“Hark for’ard!—Get on to him!”

Again that blare of the horn, the single note cutting the day in two, and the voice of a hound lifted in forlorn warning. Another forward dash, a swerve to the right, the water again and five horses over, Miss Dulcie and her

brother among them. Then the hounds whipped off again, to the cry of "Get back!"

"There are too many scents on the Moor," said someone discontentedly. "Those people afoot ought to be turned off."

"Why were the hounds driven back? One of them spoke, anyhow! I could show you where they lost it."

"They got on to another hare, I think. The Moor swarms with hares."

Mrs Devereux sat still in the sunshine and looked round her. The sun was climbing the heavens now, and oh, but the day was glorious!—too glorious on which to think of the extraordinary tragedy of death. The sunshine warmed the willing earth, and the physical landscape that went to the edges of the world; it warmed the satin coats of the hunters and the backs and bosoms of their riders. Lily shifted the bay mare cautiously until she positioned her behind Vane-Hurst, who had fallen into conversation with the Devonshire farmer; his hair took a gloss in the light, and his huge figure showed to the best advantage in the saddle, though the Irish mare tossed flakes of foam from her fierce lips as a tribute to his horsemanship. There was the new look in Mrs Devereux's eyes as they rested on him, the absolute tenderness that forgot the surroundings and the whole day in him.

Again "For'ard! For'ard!"

Ah! they had it now! And keener than before on the lost scent the circle widened and swept away over the Moor, with a plunge and a rush that threatened to override hounds. This is not the orthodox description of a hunting run; I shall give you no fifty minutes over the grass, or even of stone walls and bank-jumping. But let me assure the novice that if you keep your seat

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for the first five minutes over Dartmoor, regardless of gorse and broken ground, that you may keep it to the end of the day. I have no fear for Mrs Devereux now, or Miss Dulcie, though San Toy is fighting the curb and going head in air. The hounds had got a fifteen minutes' gallop at least, and the jolly morning was alive with the chase.

Mrs Devereux found herself galloping side by side with Vane-Hurst, and without turning her head was aware of him in every forward stride. Nor did she think it any sin any more than Bay Feyrie, who seemed for the nonce one with her. She could not tell if it were she who guided the horse, or the horse who simply carried her; for, just for the moment, she had a glimpse of that intoxicating sense of identification with her mount that makes the real horsewoman. Perhaps, after all, the enjoyment was due to the mare's perfect manners and yet uncontrollable stride.

"For who can *ride* Feyrie—dear Bay Feyrie!—
Hold her when she gallops through the morning?"

Certainly not such a tyro as Lily Devereux. The "quick burst" gave her time to feel but not be afraid, and if anything flinched it was her sympathy, slave to the poor driven thing that was making the excuse for this splendid abandonment of exercise. She was somehow glad, without asking herself why, when the widening prospect closed again, and she looked round to find herself still on the open stretch of the moor, a few scattered members of the hunt slowing down near her, and the majority still hovering on the flanks of the master and his pack.

"By Jove! that was a sprint!" said Major Teddy, taking out his watch. "Nearly twelve. Have you had enough?"

"If you have."

"Then we'll be getting home, I think. People are thinning."

Again the resemblance of a cubbing morning to a party was ludicrously present to Lily's mind, for riders did not "fall out" as on a regular day, they said farewell in a decorous and leisurely fashion during a check and hacked off in twos and threes. Near by she heard the Devonshire farmer urged to stay and lunch on the way home, and one man who seemed too popular for his good offered three whiskies and sodas and the loan of as many hunting flasks. "You must pass my place—come in and have a drink," said one man after another. "Going now? All right, I'll come too." "Oh, are you off? I'm riding your way."

Vane-Hurst turned aside to speak to Beauman, and returned to find Mrs Devereux walking the mare slowly in the wake of Mr Hard and his friends. "All right," said Major Teddy offhandedly. "We're all going. What are you looking at?"

"I am watching those men in front. Do you know one of them has just been offered seven drinks and accepted three! He will surely be ill!"

Vane-Hurst choked, and met her laughing eyes. "You needn't grieve over their digestions. Men can take a lot out hunting. I will show you presently. Aren't you thirsty?"

"I could drink the sea. But I beg you won't demonstrate!"

"No more than your friends in front. Let's push on, please, and I'll ask them where we can lunch."

They caught the other riders at the head of the lane leading to Horrabridge, and Vane-Hurst asked the way. "Is there anywhere that we can lunch? I have a lady with me."

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"Oh yes, there's a very decent inn in Horrabridge, I think"—it was the man who had been offered so many drinks who answered—but he turned for affirmation to Mr Hard. "Jim, is there an inn in Horrabridge where a lady could lunch?"

"Yes, right through the village—the Roborough Manor House."

"Thank you very much," said Vane-Hurst courteously, and they began to jog ahead down the lane.

"I like that Devon farmer!" said Mrs Devereux, with a restless feeling that desultory conversation was as armour of proof. She did not know what she feared in silence, but she was reluctant to stop talking.

"Yes, he's a good sort. There are some men whom all other men *know* to be white—but I think women haven't got the instinct as a rule."

"I wonder if men's instinct about anything is really keener than women's!" she said musingly, glad of the impersonal discussion. "I have often heard people talk about 'first impressions,' but I don't think I have them strongly myself."

"What was your first impression about me? Can you remember the first time we met?"

Now that is the most fatal question of all, and Lily recognised it as such. It usually comes a stage later in the intimacy, when other explanations have occurred; but it is bound to come. She had no intention of answering it, however, so long as she had an excuse for ignoring it, and rode on in silence all down the deep lane into Horrabridge. Vane-Hurst was silent too, which was ominous. At the end of the straggling houses he turned to the right as directed, and pulled up before the white fronted Inn.

"We can lunch here," he said, "if you don't mind eggs and bacon."

"It was bacon only the other day when I lunched with Lord Malbrook," Lily remarked drily, as she dismounted. "Where are the others?"

"I don't know—gone on," he replied laconically. "Have you been here before then?"

"No, but we had lunch at another moorland inn the day you came."

"Well, you know the worst then!" he remarked in a composed tone that reassured her—falsely. "Will you go in and order what you like, while I arrange about the horses?"

She walked into a hall passage, and turned hesitatingly to a room on the left, where she saw a table spread with a white cloth and the remnants of luncheon. But it smelt strongly of smoke, and she retreated.

"Have you any other room?" she asked the woman who came forward to see what she wanted. "We should like to lunch here—if you have anything?"

Oh yes, the inn could supply them with luncheon—of sorts, and there was another room. It was smaller than the first one Mrs Devereux had investigated, and looked out at the back of the inn over a glorious stretch of sunny open land that made the confines of the little parlour seem all the smaller. Lily threw up the window and was leaning on the sill, her troubled eyes resting on Horrabridge Church and its adjacent meadows, when Vane-Hurst returned. He seemed so much too large for the room that she had a desire to laugh hysterically when she turned round.

"Well," he said. "Anything to eat?"

"Eggs and bacon—or bread and cheese," she remarked quietly, sitting down on the horsehair sofa with

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a feeling that her surroundings were a bad dream. The exhilaration of the morning had suddenly left her, and she was afraid again, though she could not have defined her reason. There was nothing in Vane-Hurst's face or manner save a certain repression to make her nervous ; it was more the close quarters at which she found herself with him that were alarming, so that she longed to break down the walls and get away. If the crisis were to come she wished it had somehow come on the Moor, rather than in this cheap little room with its dreadful furniture and endless glass and china ornaments. It seemed as if all the great moments of her life were to be indifferently staged, for she remembered the dressing-room at the Riding School, and the stress of the situation between her and Mrs Errington that had come upon her there. For a minute she felt that even the prosaic details of that background were preferable to the irritating ugliness of the inn parlour, and turned her grave eyes again upon the glad green world outside. For the hills and valleys rose up and fell down in little heaps, and the outstanding moors against the sky were true Devon—a patchwork picture, as vivid and sunny as only the West Country can give in the largess of Nature's charity.

Vane-Hurst had relapsed again into silence, but his presence was overwhelming to Mrs Devereux's consciousness even while she looked steadily out of the window. It was a relief when the brief luncheon arrived, and they sat down to bread and cheese, over which she lingered longer than he, half dreading the moment when the prosaic eating should be over and the people of the inn should leave them finally to themselves. She had supposed that her dawdling had looked like hunger, but his comment undeceived her.

"I am afraid you have had a very poor luncheon.

Are you sure you will not have some cyder ? They are sure to have that."

" No, thanks—I liked the cold water."

" I will tell them to clear away then, while I go and order the horses."

" Oh, are they rested ? " she asked, with a curious mingling of relief and reluctance. She knew that his leave had been very short, and that this was probably the last time they would be alone together, even though he came over to Plym again. She had struggled and planned for this ; but her success hurt her none the less.

" They will be in half-an-hour more," he said composedly. " I am coming back for a cigarette."

Then she saw that the battle was only deferred, and listened to his retreating feet with a heart that beat time to her own despair. He was some minutes gone, and when he returned the table was only covered with its white cloth, and Mrs Devereux was alone. She had taken off the hard riding hat, and paid some feminine attention to her hair, for its soft thickness was unflattened despite the severity of its dressing. It was brushed straight back from her forehead and twisted into a heavy roll at the nape of the neck to hold the elastic. Vane-Hurst looked at her sleek head and the clean sweep of her shoulders under the habit cloth as he came into the room, for she had her back to him again, leaning at the window. She heard his entrance, and the click of the closing door like Fate, but she did not turn round this time until he spoke.

" I want to know why you ran away from town as you did ? "

" I have told you," she said a little wearily, as if the uselessness of her defence tired her. " Muriel asked me to Plym, and the season was over."

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"That was not your reason," he asserted still quietly, but with more pent-up feeling in his tone. "You ran away from me!"

"If you think so," she said slowly, measuring her words, "is not that sufficient to close the subject between us?"

"It would not be fair," he said quickly. "I want an explanation——"

"Even though you think I do not?"

"Yes, because you must understand me. I am not a passing amusement in any woman's hands—you cannot take me up and throw me down, like Chateris, for instance!"

The blood rose to her face in her indignation. Was this how her suffering was to be priced? That she had been the one to take it lightly?

"I have never dreamed of treating you like that!" she said in a low voice that shook a little. "I knew you might go to India—I thought the friendship must end——"

Her voice died away, for her eyes had met his at last across the room, and he held her as in a physical vice. She had never known such intentness or such power in a human gaze before, and her resistance fell before it.

"Friendship?" he said abruptly. "Love!" The two words caught the air like blows. Without knowing why, she uttered a little cry and put her hands up to her ears as if she could not endure the thunder of the confession. He had been standing by the table, only a foot or so away; but he stepped forward on the cry and pulled her hands away and held them.

"You must listen!" he said. "It is childish to refuse. And we are neither of us children. Men and women know what such an experience as ours means."

"What does it mean?" she asked blankly, looking up into his implacable face. "Suffering? I have felt that. Humiliation? I have drunk that cup to the dregs. A long grey future to look forward to, because we have dared to watch one sunrise in the present——"

"No! no!" he broke in with soft, quick impatience, and his grip on her hands tightened until he hurt her. "Why should all this happen to us? We have done no one any wrong—we have not even broken the meaningless tie that binds you—yet."

"Yet!" she echoed reproachfully, raising her frank eyes to his face. "Are you going to ask me to break it then?"

"Why not?" he said boldly. "It is only a conventionality, after all. You owe nothing to the man you call husband, and you are nothing to him. He has forfeited his right to you, long since."

"And for that very reason you would have me sink to his level!" she retorted quickly. "I have at least kept myself clean by contrast. Would *you* be the one to drag me down?"

"No," he answered steadily. "Not down. I do not ask you to do the thing he did—to be unfaithful in his house—I want you to stand for the right of our love, bravely, in the face of all the world."

"I do not understand!" she said breathlessly. He was leaning over her, his eyes devouring her face, and his breath on her hair, confusing her by the physical contact. Even as he spoke his arm had somehow gathered her closer so that she felt the strangeness of his masculine strength through the close embrace. It came with the shock of a totally new experience, so little had the early days of her marriage impressed themselves on her mind. And indeed she had been so much a girl

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that she had hardly felt anything but shy and vaguely flattered in Ainslie's arms. It was the woman in her now that responded, and made her tremble all through with an equal tenderness.

"I shall take you away—quite away, to the uttermost ends of the earth if needs be!" he said in a breathless whisper. "I know you would not accept me as a lover otherwise—oh, and I love you the more for it! Let's throw everything else to the winds, so long as we have each other. It's worth it, Lily—on my soul it is!"

A certain boyish recklessness in his speech made her feel suddenly the older. She looked up and drew back, checking him with a restraining hand laid on his broad chest. He read love in the upturned eyes and drank of it thirstily, like a man long parched; but when he tried to fold her closer the gentle resistance repelled him.

"Kiss me!" he pleaded. "Do kiss me!"

He was so sure of her, so certain of success, that she realised with blank dismay the task before her. For he knew that he loved her and she him, and all things else dropped into insignificance before the mighty illumination. He was quite ready to offer her his whole life on the instant, and had already flung the world's honour, his own future, all chances of existence, into the scale, in headlong fashion. There was much of the boy in him—poor Teddy!—and it was for this characteristic also that she loved him, while it made her part the harder. To forget self she must appear more ungenerous than he, yet while she put his good before her own she was making the keener sacrifice.

"I can't do what you ask," she said baldly, with dry lips. "It is not that I am afraid—it is not because of any censure the world might give us—but there is much at stake you have not considered."

"Tell me!" he said, but he was only awaiting the opportunity to snatch her lips, and she knew that defeat had not dawned on him yet.

"We are not children, as you say," she pleaded, trying gently to release herself. "You have hurried into this on impulse. Do you realise what it would mean in the future?"

"Oh, I've weighed all the pros and cons," he declared. "I know I am asking a big thing of you—but you are not a woman of whom one asks a little. I have been thinking it over ever since you left town. It is the only tolerable thing for both of us. We are both in earnest, and ready to stand by our convictions."

"That is not all," she urged. "There are other considerations."

"None greater!"

She turned from him in a momentary despair, and her eyes went blindly out at the open window, over the sunny hillside, and the spire of the little church pointing unavailingly to heaven. All the riotous joy of the morning seemed suddenly gone from the scene, yet she felt vaguely, as in a dream, the great patience of the Universe, waiting for God. . . .

"There must be something greater than even the granting of one's heart's desire," she said slowly, as if the words hardly belonged to her. "If I had only loved myself I should say yes, oh, so gladly!"

"Lily *darling*!" he stammered, the eagerness to fix her at that confession making him dumb. He did not want to go on to the argument he saw in her averted face.

"But I love *you*," she said, more slowly still, "and I will not do this thing and spoil your life. For I should spoil it, even though I could love you five times better

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than I do. A man's life is larger than love, Teddy—love won't fill it to the margin, because it was not intended to do so."

"What else will you fill it with?" he asked scornfully. "You are taking wife, children and home from me. It must be a large alternative you offer!"

Her face flushed with the suddenness of the temptation he had thrust upon her. It was a vision she had hardly dared to contemplate as yet; but to him it had taken definite form.

"Love—and all you say——" she stumbled over the dearer phrases—"are not a small part of a man's life; but he must have them legitimately, with the responsibilities they bring. Such things come to a man as the reason for his endeavour—the centre of his life perhaps, the motive power to help him fulfil his destiny. But we—we should have to steal it, and to hold it under the rose—for a time at least—and it would rob you of other things you ought to have."

"Well?" he asked a little coldly, and the disappointment in his voice cut her like a knife.

"Your career!" she said, struggling to be brave. "Your work."

"My career!" he ridiculed, a little sadly. "A man doesn't begin a career at forty! I have never done anything very brilliant."

"You are not forty yet," she insisted, looking up at the bright head that always seemed so young, and the vivid life in his face. Teddy never looked sleepy; she could hardly fancy him asleep, and there would be something pathetically helpless about him if he were.

"Very nearly," he said, and his lips tightened as if obstinate at his own failure.

"Well, you have many years before you still, and the vitality of ten men. You have only lacked initiative. I believe in you, if you do not believe in yourself."

"Oh, you want me to be a kind of demigod!" he protested. "I am only a man, with a man's needs. Tell me this, would you rather have me a success in India, supposing I could be, and found my chance there, than a failure even at your side?"

For a minute she faltered, and it seemed to her that the brand of Cain was on her for loving, his cry in her heart: "My punishment is greater than I can bear!" Mrs Errington had warned her well not to lose the end in the means! And the man was waiting, with those intent eyes. . . .

"I love you," she repeated, desperately clinging to the one certain thing she had evolved out of her mental chaos. "I want what is best for you, and I am sure that it is best for you to be alone, even though it means the end of everything for me. Don't ask me what I would rather have for myself."

She turned away from him as if at the end of her endurance, and sat down on the hard horsehair sofa, turning her pleading face to the deaf world beyond the window. The day had suddenly darkened, and rolling clouds were chasing each other through the limpid sky. It seemed a picture of her life that had been so passingly bright in the morning's sunshine.

For a minute Teddy stood by the table where she had left him. Then he crossed the room after her, persistently, and to her dismay knelt down at her knee, half encircling her with his arms.

"Don't send me away without you, Lily!" he said hurriedly. "You don't know me. I want a woman in my life, whether it be for good or evil. If it is you it will

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be for good. Don't throw me over to someone worthless——"

He had leant his head against her shoulder so that the last words were half muffled, but it filled her with sudden terror to think that perhaps she had not known him, as he said—that perhaps she was pushing him down rather than dragging him up as she had meant. Her own arms went round his broad shoulders for a moment with an instinct of agonised protection. The sacrifice of her own life seemed to her nothing if it would help him, and indeed she did not think of it at all. Her mind was concentrated on the horrible doubt he had raised, and she saw the whole world as a pitfall into which he might stumble without her, worse than with her. "She did not know if she prayed. Men will solemnly speak a shy prayer to the Deity in actual words at a crisis, while a woman shrieks her soul out without form or voice in one tremendous appeal. If there were any answer it must have been in the sense that by surrendering her faith in him she might take his faith in himself also.

"You won't do that!" she said breathlessly, while for a minute she still held him, clinging to the dear reality of his manhood in her arms. "And you could not lean on me—you are too strong in yourself. You would never let any woman lead you!"

"You would influence me—you have, ever since I knew you!" The whisper tempted her as subtly as the snake's in Eden.

"I daren't," she said sharply, in her pain. "I know it is not for me."

"You mean you would rather not undertake such a job!" he said with a hard little laugh, raising himself from his knees, and standing up, while her arms fell to

her sides, empty. "Well, if you won't you won't. I sha'n't ask you again."

He walked over to the little fireplace where there was no fire, and leaned his elbow on the shelf amongst all the china gimcracks, and dropped his sunny head in his hands. A vase was pushed to the edge of the shelf and tottered. Mrs Devereux watched it with fascinated eyes, and nearly cried a warning even in the midst of her sense of unbearable tragedy. She was facing the future now, even while she still held him in actual vision—a big man with averted head leaning on his hand, his face turned from her, his very attitude pitifully despondent. It was no use saying that Time would heal the pain—that it would not always be as maddening as this. She knew that it would grow no better, and she looked to bear a keener pang with each day of better realisation of what she had foregone, being a woman who could not lie to herself. It was one of those things that are infinitely worse in realisation than in anticipation, for she was only at the beginning of her development, and she could not go back. With each progressive step she would learn to love more rather than less, and would remember this man to her own hurt by the tenacity of her nature. The man, who was more impulsive and imaginative than she, had far better chances from Time—who is not always a perfect healer and consoler, in spite of the soothing theory to that effect.

The silence in the room grew intolerable, and he broke it as if impelled. "What are you going to do with your own life? Have you thought of that?"

"Not yet. I shall have plenty of time—afterwards."

"It will be sufficient to remember the high ideal you have set for me, I suppose!" he said sarcastically.

"You think that having robbed us both of what makes

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life worth living, you can sit down for evermore and contemplate the sacrifice without dissatisfaction. I hope it may prove all-sufficient, once the enthusiasm of the moment is passed."

"If one does the duty that lies nearest—" she faltered, as one afraid to preach—"with singleness of heart, there is no room for dissatisfaction."

"What a woman's theory! Will you find a man who can?" he asked bitterly, in his own sense of short-coming.

"I find that all men can," she answered quickly. "From the king to the peasant. It is a motley ideal. Why should you not join it?"

"Because it is so cold!" he said, with an impulsiveness that made him seem younger than ever. "You have taken all the nearness and dearness out of my life, and you offer me a kind of school curriculum in its place!"

She looked across the little room at him with pitiful eyes that she might have bent on a petulant child crying against a justice it cannot understand. But she did not attempt to answer, and it seemed as if all the fire of his protest died out in the silence.

"Is my career the only barrier you have to raise between us?" he asked at last. The very tone of his voice was changed. It was cynical, almost indifferent.

"There are your family ties—everything that is intrinsically in your life," she said gently. "Have you thought what everyone would say? How your father would regard it? As it is your sister will hardly speak to me. I have seen that of late, and have realised why."

"Good heavens! I have a right to say what I will do with my life! I am not in leading strings to my family!" he burst out again, almost as fiercely as before.

"If I do not choose to weigh their opinion, you need not."

"You may not choose to consider them now, in the heat of the moment, but they mean a great deal to you in reality," she said patiently. "It would be a rankling sore if there were any breach between you and your people."

He gave a short hard laugh. "Well, I differ from you. I think I should be perfectly content with the one thing I have missed in my life. But you will not give it to me. We needn't argue." There was a pause, and he added quietly, "Are you rested now?"

"Yes," she said, and she knew then that the struggle was over and for a second could have fallen at his feet and begged him to break down her resolution, to take her in spite of herself. But he was already at the door, and she heard him give the order for the horses to be brought round. Then he turned and waited while she deliberately put on her hat with fingers that hardly trembled, and picked up her riding whip. The little commonplace actions seemed the knell of the tragedy.

"Ready?" he said.

"Quite," she answered calmly, but he still stood holding the door, and as she reached him he bent down and touched her shoulder without any words. Then she lifted her face, as white as her name-flowers, and they kissed each other. But she knew that it was good-bye. . . .

The day had darkened into a stormy afternoon as they came out into the porch, and mounted, and a few fitful drops of rain fell as they rode in silence up the road towards Yelverton. Vane-Hurst struck off across the down before reaching that town, and put the Irish mare into a gallop, for the storm was coming up behind them ;

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but Mrs Devereux had no time to think of the wind and the rain lashing her, for Bay Feyrie was pulling for home, and she had all her work cut out to hold the mare and to follow that figure of her guide, bucketing ahead. He rode almost recklessly over the rough ground, steering by his slight knowledge of the locality, but he did not draw rein nor did she come abreast with him until they sighted some big iron gates on the right. It was the first sign of a habitation they had seen for some miles.

"Lopes' place," he said laconically. "We strike off here."

Mrs Devereux knew the way now, but even had she not done so the mare would have taken her home. Feyrie pricked up her ears, turned her head to the darkening down, and set off at a steady gallop that did not slacken until the lodge lights of Plym glimmered out of the twilight. It was early for lamps, but the day had settled into a streaming downpour, and by the time they reached the stableyard Mrs Devereux's habit was soaked.

"I am afraid you are wet through?" Vane-Hurst said with formal solicitude as the groom dismounted her.

"Nor more than you are," she answered quietly.

"Oh, I am all right. I shall not take cold," he said indifferently. "Are the rest of the party back, Richards?"

"Yes, sir. Came in at two o'clock."

"Will you make my apologies, Mrs Devereux?" Vane-Hurst said, turning to her. "I want to get back to Plymouth as soon as the car is ready."

"Car's ready now, sir," Richards interpolated, touching his cap.

"All right—come, chauffeur," Vane-Hurst responded, as the lights of the motor slowly issued from the yard, causing Bay Feyrie to back suspiciously.

"But—you cannot drive all that way dripping wet!" Mrs Devereux protested in a low tone. Her anxious eyes looked out of a colourless face which was wet with the driven rain—not with tears. She thought he glanced at her curiously.

"You need not concern yourself about me, really," he said. "You are not responsible for me in the future!"

She did not answer the taunt. If a child had said it the hurt would have been as obvious under the sting, and she put it by with the patience of an older person. All she said was, "I really think you would be wiser to ask Lady Malbrook for a change of clothes and—and some stimulant." He shook his head, and turned to the car. "Very well, you know best," she added quietly. "Good-night!"

"Good-bye!" he responded, accenting the final word she had instinctively avoided, and even as she walked up the broad steps to the great door she saw his lights flash down the drive, past her, heard the rush and vibration of the motor taking him out on the downs again, and away out of her life.

"Major Vane-Hurst would not stay—he wanted to get back to Plymouth and change his clothes," she heard herself say collectedly as she came face to face with Lady Malbrook in the warmth and light of the hall.

"Poor Teddy! I hope he won't get cold. We could have given him a change," exclaimed her hostess. She glanced at the mask of Mrs Devereux's white face as if something stirred vaguely in her conscience, and made her uncomfortable. "Why, you are soaking, Lily!" she went on solicitously. "Do go and change. Who would have thought that a day with such a bright beginning would have ended in this!"

The words followed Mrs Devereux as she mounted the

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stairs, like an epilogue. Half-way up the flight she paused a minute as if too utterly tired to go further ; but the remainder of the steps had to be accomplished, and as if she recalled the inevitable she toiled on again after the minute's rest, her face fallen into a new patience.

“ Who would have thought that a day with such a bright beginning would have ended in—this ! ”

CHAPTER XVII

" The bridegroom, not a thought to be seen
On his steady brow and quiet mouth,
Said : ' Too much favour for me so mean !

For I ride—what should I do but ride ? ' "

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE Ladies Viva and Sacharissa Beauman were left in town for a week after their mother's departure for Plym Castle, partly to finish their riding and dancing lessons, partly because the house on the Norfolk coast whither they were going was not quite ready for them. The weather had turned wet in town, after an exceptionally hot summer, and it was not considered desirable to keep them confined in a smaller house owing to rain—particularly the Lady Sweetie. It had been arranged, however, that the day after their last riding lesson they should proceed to the sea in charge of their long-suffering governess and nurses, and would be received by an elderly and adoring relative (a cousin of Lord Malbrook's) who was unshaken in her conviction that angel faces portrayed hearts of gold despite Sweetie's flagrant wickedness and Viva's puzzling ways. " Cousin Anstice " was rather a favourite with both children, whose expressions of preference took the form of unmerciful tyranny, and Lady Malbrook was really dismayed on one occasion to discover that Sweetie had driven the elderly lady tandem with Viva all down the sea front, while the local tradesmen gathered in knots to see an esteemed resident " make a live fool of herself ! " until rescued by nurse.

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"I can't think why you let them do it, Anstice!" Lady Malbrook said, almost in angry tears. "They behave like fiends—demons—to you! And I assure you that they are not always so—unless you encourage them," she added truthfully.

"My dear Muriel," said Cousin Anstice timidly, "it really was not very far—and our doctor has prescribed gentle exercise for me so often!"

"Gentle exercise! And Sweetie beating you with the butcher's whip which you own she stole out of his cart, and Viva running at top speed to drag you on!"

"Well, well, perhaps their high spirits made them forget that their old cousin can't run as far as their little legs. But oh, Muriel! if you had seen Sweetie when she begged me to be a little horse just for two minutes! Her curls were all ruffled by the wind and her eyes like two dark stars——"

"Dark fiddlesticks!" said Sweetie's mother wrathfully. "She knows as well as you do that if she looks at you like that you'd give her your head to play with if you could! Sweetie makes eyes as much as the last heroine of comic opera!"

Miss Anstice was shocked, but unconvinced. That anything so cherubic as her vision of Sweetie, with divine bare legs and cheeks faintly kissed by the sun (Sweetie never burned red—she kept an Egyptian pallor), could harbour a malicious intention was impossible in her gentle mind; and that Sweetie cherished secret hopes of "driving Cousin Anstice till she flopped down," the very next time she went to Norfolk, was an anticipation mercifully hidden from the old lady's mind. But it is a fact that it was such a possibility that added not a little to Sweetie's joy in leaving town. Sand castles and impromptu baths in the rock pools, after being expressly

forbidden to wet one's clothes, were certainly enjoyments; but they lacked the personal tyranny that was the breath of Sweetie's life. In her terrific little fashion she loved Miss Anstice, but the excitement of cruelty was an unexplained temptation to Sweetie at her present age. "She will outgrow it," said that wise physician, Sir Francis Parkin (the "Doctor Potts" of his small patient's list of nicknames). "It is an irritation of the brain. Don't worry yourself, Lady Malbrook, and don't be too angry with her. In a way she cannot help it."

Lady Sweetie therefore looked forward to torturing her willing victim, Cousin Anstice, and left town without a regret behind her. Lady Viva was torn between a passionate love of the sea, too great to be put into words, and as passionate a resentment of being parted from her father and mother and from the Riding Master. The height of Viva's ambition was to be taken to Plym Castle with her parents, a desire she had never breathed to either of them from that "strangeness" which Lady Malbrook objected to, and which had its rise in this case in an exquisite sensitiveness and the grief of feeling that she was not wanted. Lady Malbrook took her small dogs with her—prize animals, too precious to be trusted to servants—but Viva did not rank herself with "Plym Boy" and "Plym Girl." She would be in the way, she would be out of place—she knew it as keenly as if Lady Malbrook had carelessly explained it to her, but she gave neither of her parents the chance to so explain it.

"Some day, when I'm quite grown up, I'll tell them. I sha'n't mind then," said Viva to her own heart. But she never grew up to the extent of overcoming her own innate characteristics, and the tragedies of her life at seventy would be the same as at ten years.

It was a great grief to part from the Riding Master,

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because she would not see him for two months at least ; but she was fairly confident that the lessons would be renewed in the autumn, because it was an easy and practical way of accustoming both children to ride to send them out with the master or Durban, even though they should be in no particular need of further tuition. Their last lesson was taken in the School on account of its being a wet day ; not on this occasion for some mis-demeanour of Sweetie's ; but it promised to be stormy inside as well as out, owing to that lady's rising spirits at the prospect of immediate holidays, change, and poor Cousin Anstice.

" We're going away to-morrow ! " she announced boastfully, as soon as the lesson had begun. " We're going to the sea. We're going for ever so, ever so long ! "

" And I suppose you're very glad ? " said the Riding Master, smiling down into the brilliant, excited eyes. Sweetie tossed her curls and gave a little laugh of absolute intoxication, as if her vitality bubbled over.

" I'm gladder than gladder than glad ! " she half chanted, tilting her head back to look up at the skylight on which the rain was pattering dismally. " No more silly old rain—no more stupid old streets—no more *Lessons* ! " (With a glance out of the long-shaped eyes at the Master.) " Good-bye, old London ! good-bye ! good-bye ! " She broke suddenly and unexpectedly into a bar of a song she had heard her mother sing, and rendered it perfectly in her sweet, childish voice. The Riding Master could hardly help the laugh that rose to his lips as he said : " Sh !—sh !—sh !—you'll frighten the pony. "

" Are you going to have a holiday ? " asked Lady Viva on his other side, looking up in her turn. He could not avoid thinking what beautiful faces they were that were

raised to him—both children so vivid and brilliant that their parents must indeed be more than mortal not to feel pride in them. And then his thought flashed back to another face he had seen not so long since—a fair woman whose own loveliness had seemed to fill the gallery with the grace of sunshine—and he found the origin of all this spendthrift beauty there.

“I am going away for three weeks later on,” he said, in answer to Viva’s question. “When all my pupils have left town, and don’t want me any longer.”

“Only three weeks!” said Viva, wrinkling her brows. “Isn’t that a very little holiday?”

“It’s all I can afford, my lady. I have to work very hard, you see.”

“I wish we could take you with us,” said Viva, sighing. “That *would* be nice! And Mr Durban could do your work.”

“And how about Mr Durban’s holiday?—Sit up, please, Lady Sweetie!” said the Riding Master, his quick eye detecting his younger pupil in a very negligent attitude while he chatted with her sister. “I don’t want your last lesson to leave me thinking that I have not even taught you to sit properly! When you go away I hope you will get some riding and try to remember everything I have told you.”

The Riding Master could not help being a trifle didactic in his homilies, and the Lady Sweetie resented anything in the way of righteousness thrust upon her. Her dark eyes lightened with a flash that her world knew well; but her tone was one of dreamy speculation while she sat up as requested.

“I wonder if Satan can ride!” she said with apparent irrelevance.

Now this was ominous—a reference to the Prince of

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Darkness generally preceding an obsession by him according to Lady Sweetie's explanation of her subsequent behaviour ; but the Riding Master, not being so accustomed to such references as her parents and guardians, was on the point of administering a reproof when he was stopped by Viva.

" Don't take any notice if you want her to be good ! " she whispered warily. " Perhaps she'll forget—let's do something ! "

" Trot ! " said the Riding Master, feeling very much as if it were a concession to wickedness. But the fracas was averted for the time being at any rate, and the Master kept them wisely on the move for the rest of the lesson, which he made a short one. Viva sighed slightly as he lifted her down from the saddle at the end, and told her that he was very pleased with the way she had ridden ; but Sweetie hardly waited to say good-bye before she rushed across the School waving her riding stick and chanting a kind of pæan of liberty—" All old horrid lessons over—off to the sea ! Good-bye, old Jones—I'm jolly glad—you're—not—coming—too ! "

" Lady Sweetie ! " said the exasperated nurse, seizing her by the arm as she rushed into the gallery, and giving her a slight shake. " How can you be so rude and naughty ! I'll write to your mamma, that I will, and you won't be allowed any treats for a week ! "

" Don't ! " said the child angrily, swinging herself free and making for the dressing-room. " You can tell Mummie just what you like, and I don't care ! So there ! " She did care in her heart, for she knew that she was risking a week's pleasure for the irresistible impertinence to the Riding Master, if it reached Lady Malbrook's ears. But the intoxication of her own high spirits and the prospect of the holidays were too much

for Lady Sweetie's prudence. She was over-excited, as both sisters were apt to be far more easily than any of their elders—save the Doctor—could realise, and when she danced out into the gallery again with her cap and coat on she was pale rather than red with the suppressed turmoil in her veins. Nurse was still dressing Viva, so Sweetie looked over the edge of the "Royal Box" and observed that the next pupil was the pale, timid child she disliked by instinct—the boy whom she had tried to frighten before. Sydney Errington was indeed taking his last lesson also, and sitting his pony with a better balance and grip than seemed possible when he first came to the School. He did the Master's infinite patience and determination great credit, and was allowed to have his lesson without anyone looking on, his foreign nurse fetching him after it was over. Sweetie longed to fling a taunt at him, but she realised that it was too far off to be effective; she curbed her temper therefore until Nurse and Viva appeared, and then ran downstairs in front of them, bubbling over with mischief, and the desire to do something unusually naughty to mark her leave-taking—a dramatic exit that should draw attention to herself. As it chanced, Durban had just passed through the door by which the horses came into the School, and had left it open. He was not in sight, but Sweetie saw her opportunity and grasped it. She turned to the left instead of into the passage leading out into the street, and charged full into the School, shouting at the top of her voice:

"Look out, boy! Your pony's going to kick! You'll fall! Hoo-roo-oo-h!"

The wild yell in the high childish voice caught an echo from the hollow end of the School where the Riding Master stood waiting for a fresh horse to be brought to

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him while he criticised Sydney's seat. He turned at the sound and saw the small, disobedient figure with flourishing arms advancing on Sydney and the pony, but he was too late to prevent what happened. Sweetie pranced straight at the pony, gesticulating and shouting, meaning to frighten him and make him swerve. She did not in the least mind Sydney getting a fall, for she had had dozens herself, and thought nothing of them, being without fear and dropping nimbly from the saddle once she lost her balance. But Sydney had neither her nerve nor her horsemanship. He saw her advancing on him and gave a wild jerk to the reins, startling his pony still more. The little beast plunged and reared suddenly, as much to avoid Sweetie as from fear, for with a horse's wonderful care for human beings he was doing his best to help kicking her. But Sydney was too inexperienced to know this, and lost his head. Unheeding the Riding Master's cry of, "Let him go! Lower your hands!" he pulled still harder, the pony lost his balance, and both came over together on to the tan, the pony rolling over his rider before he picked himself up like a cat and dashed for the open door that Sweetie had left, to regain his stable.

Sydney Errington lay still where he had fallen, his forlorn little fair head on the tan, and his limp body horribly motionless. He looked so like a dead boy that for the minute Sweetie was half paralysed by what she had done. She was creeping closer to look at him when the Riding Master reached the spot in his rush across the School to the rescue, and, looking up, the cause of all the mischief saw his face. For a minute Sweetie paused, more frightened than she had ever been in her life; then without one word she fled headlong, reaching the outside door to the street just as her nurses had missed

her. The rest of her party having been in the passage, had not witnessed her naughtiness and its dire result, but she caught her nurse's hand with breathless terror and dragged her outside the school. "Come home—come home quick!" she said, panting. "I want to get home. Oh, Nurse, do come!"

There was a half-caught sob in the imploring tones, and the bewildered woman began mechanically to lift both her charges into the cab that had been called for them. "What has happened? Where did you get to?" she demanded suspiciously.

"Nothing!" muttered Sweetie, turning her white face and trembling lips even from Viva.

"I believe you were up to something—Ada, go back and see what has happened," said Nurse to the under maid, half in curiosity it must be owned.

The girl was only gone for a few seconds, and came back looking as scared as Sweetie.

"There has been an accident—a little boy is hurt, and Mr Durban's telephoning for his people!" she said, "We're not to wait, Nurse—the Master sent me off in double quick time. He says he's going to write and tell Lady Malbrook what you did, Lady Sweetie, and he'll never have you here again. My! he was in a passion!"

Then Lady Sweetie broke down and burst into a storm of tears. The overstrain of excitement was bringing its own reaction, coupled with the fright she had received in meeting the Riding Master's eyes. There was no need to tell her that he was angry. For once she was thoroughly cowed, even by the memory of his face.

Yet if she could have seen him after she rushed from the School she would not have witnessed that overwhelming wrath that in her childish mind was almost an awful thing, and which she had an unusual dread would

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follow and overtake her even when she reached the safe shelter of her own home. She had left the Riding Master little time to be angry indeed. All his energies at the moment were absorbed with the victim of the accident.

He picked up the inert little body, dashed through the door and up the stairs—along the gallery to the dressing-room, calling “Rivers!” The urgency of his own voice did not strike him, but it seemed as if his will had brought the woman to the dressing-room even as he reached it himself. She held out her arms with a shocked exclamation.

“Little Master Errington! An accident, sir?”

“Yes—lay him down—see where he’s hurt if you can. I’m going to the telephone——”

Down again, three steps at a time, to the instrument, the receiver to his mouth almost before he had remembered Mrs Errington’s number. One of the servants spoke to him, and he heard an exclamation like the caretaker’s at his news, but her mistress was in and would come at once. He had rung off before she had time to ask for details.

He had not been gone five minutes from the dressing-room before he was there again, though in the meantime he had paused to fling an order to one of the men to go to the nearest doctor—take Champion—quick! Rivers opened the door to his knock, but barred the way to his entrance.

“Mr Lance—you can’t come in——”

“Why? Is he dead?”

“No——” she answered the quick fear in his tones with a dismay he did not understand. “There’s something very queer—I don’t know how to tell you, sir.” She leaned forward and whispered, with a furtive glance past

him into the dim shadows of the gallery. He stared at her as if he did not take in what she said, and reiterated, "What?"

"Yes, sir—I half undressed the child——"

The Riding Master pulled himself together with a jerk, and the brows over his grey eyes were knotted. "Well!" he said roughly, "That is not the point. What injuries?"

"Not many, I think—it was only a faint. I will go back——"

"Yes, go back and wait. I have sent for a doctor, and—Mrs Errington." Their eyes met through the dusk, hers with a questioning fear, his with curt dismissal in them. Rivers turned back into the room, and the Riding Master shut the door gently, as if he shut a secret in that must not escape. He stepped back into the gallery and stood a few minutes, thinking. The shadows were gathering thickly there, for the light had not been switched on in the School and only the dim gleam of the rainy afternoon through the glass roof lit up the place.

Then suddenly from the stairway into the gallery emerged a hurrying figure, and he saw Mrs Errington but a few seconds before she reached him. They stood still and looked at each other for a moment, while the rain beat on the glass like an overcharged human heart. It seemed their pulses made audible.

"Is he—killed?" she said.

"No—I hope not much injured. I have sent for a doctor."

"How was it?"

"Little Lady Sweetie Beauman escaped from her nurse and ran back into the School—they had just had their lesson. Sydney was frightened and tried to pull the pony out of her way—they both came down together——"

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"Where is he?"

"In there—" he pointed with his left hand to the dressing-room, but had never moved his eyes from her face, and the brows above them were still drawn.

"Is anyone there?"

"Rivers——"

She moved closer to him, and boldly peered into his face. Then she drew a sharp breath. "So you know!" she said.

"The woman undressed the child to see what injuries——"

"And found, not a boy but a girl!" Suddenly she flung up her head with a little low laugh that startled him. If she had seen possible death in front of her she might have laughed like that. He turned his face from her, for the first time, frowning at the floor.

"You want to know the reason of the fraud, I suppose—though it is fairly obvious!" she said, and the excitement ran on in her tones as if she were almost at a pitch of delirious enjoyment. Perhaps the situation stung her quick blood to a mad passion. "Everything depended on my having a child—an heir to Errington, you see, and the boy who would have saved me died in his infancy. I had been a neglected wife for ten years—I!" The touch of her clenched fist upon her heart was magnificent. "My husband had tired of me—kept me half acknowledged in a little corner of the world where no one knew me. I hated him—I almost laughed when he was dead. And then I found that I was to have nothing—nothing to pay me for my hell of married life; I was to be only the doubtful widow of a well-known *roué*, without the position of your stolid landed gentry that he had promised me. Not I! They wanted an heir—they should have one."

She did not pause for breath, but because his stern face asked a question through the monotonous rain and the shadows.

"I took my sister's child," she said rapidly, with a movement of the hands that half dismissed the subject. "Her parents were both dead, and there was no one to interfere. Why choose her? Because she was the only child I could force to do exactly as I told her—I could paralyse her into obedience. I dressed her as a boy, and brought her home with her native nurse to attend on her—I had to trust Transito with the secret, but the woman was devoted to me more than to the child." A little smile of self-conscious triumph and vanity flashed into her eyes even as she mentioned this small homage. "It was a nuisance her being a girl. But I hoaxed them all—yes, even the family solicitors and the stupid, chivalrous boy who owned Errington in reality. I should have played the game out too, had the child been anything but a poor rat of a thing with no red blood in her veins! She was bound to ruin it somehow, for all her fear of me."

"You forced a timid little girl into playing the part of a boy and pretending the courage she could not have!" he said at last in a tone of mingled rage and contempt for his own unconscious share in it. The child's agonised tears and cry of "I'm falling!" had a new meaning now.

He had not expected justification, and felt dully surprised when the woman pressed eagerly upon him.

"It was not my child!" she said quickly. "I never really ill-treated her—she was so easily cowed. Had it been my child do you think it would have been that white-faced, poor-spirited thing?" His reluctant eyes saw her beauty grow brilliant and glow with life and colour in defiance of any visible reason. Her lips trembled still

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and pleaded against the repulsion of his face. She was dangerous and vital and yet as wax before the heat of his anger.

"My baby died soon after it was born—I never had another child!" she said in a lower tone.¹ "Sometimes I was sorry—and sometimes glad. It would have been English and feelingless. All these Englishmen who swear they love me are puny in their passions—all but you." She paused now as if for breath, and he heard her pant as if she had been running. "If I have another child—I want—you to be its father——"

He had no time to recoil for she was upon him, her face hot with love even through the dusk, her warm figure pressed against his hard chest. Her arms were round his neck and her mouth against his, caressing the set lips. He could feel the warmth of her breath upon him, and the scent of her hair was in his nostrils. His muscles tightened all through his body, and he tried not to gasp.

"I shall have to leave England—now," said the wooing lips that were so close to his own. "Come away with me—back to South America. I have plenty of money—we should be happy! happy! happy!"

The Riding Master was shocked. He had, perhaps, as her instinct told her, capabilities of passion less under restraint because more elementary than the more refined class of Englishman—but they were not for her. Possibly some element of the peasant in him made her avowal the more shameless in his eyes. It is certain that his ideal of a lady was not that of the woman who threw herself upon his manhood like this. Whatever physical response the mere contact of her beauty may have drawn from him—beyond his will—there was no mental softening of his lips or eyes as he released himself awkwardly enough, and stepped back literally against the wall.

"Madam—excuse me——" he stammered, and the little lisp was triumphant again.

Her arms had fallen from their wild clasp under the iron patience of his compelling touch. She stared at him for a moment as if she could not believe in her rejection. For this that she had offered other men would have flung honour—life itself—to the winds. She was incredulous of failure. . . . And then the blood surged over her face until she hid it with a movement of supreme humiliation in her hands. In the same instant she turned from him and had swept out of the gallery with a swifter movement than she entered it. He heard the swish of her gown as it passed the stairs, and stumbled forward stupidly with the old habit of seeing that the men attended to her—called her a cab if her own carriage were not waiting. Then he checked himself. There was no need, and—he could not follow her.

The gallery was nearly dark, but it seemed an unfamiliar place to the Riding Master for the moment, as the scene of some sort of earthquake that had swept through it. With a natural gesture he pulled the silk handkerchief out of his cuff and passed it over his forehead, pushing away the bright crisp hair as he did after hard riding. His face in the dim light looked dazed. His only feeling was still that he had been extremely shocked.

CHAPTER XVIII

" Whenever the trees are crying aloud,
And ships are tossed at sea,
By, on the highway, low and loud,
By at the gallop goes he.
By at the gallop he goes, and then
By he comes back at the gallop again."

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

THE whole thing was so simple, when the story was—partially—made public. Mrs Errington, the dangerous widow, the wicked success of one season, was nothing but a splendid fraud who had appropriated the Errington estates for a time by a bold piracy. She was indeed Gerald Errington's wife, but she was not the mother of an heir, and Errington and such money as was entailed went back to Sir Digby. She had substituted her sister's child for her own which had died in infancy, as she had told the Riding Master, and had simply produced her own boy's birth certificate as proof of Sydney's identity. During the last years of her husband's life they had had no settled abiding place even in that obscure corner of the world where she had avowed he had hidden her, but had moved about from place to place across the Continent, from Chili to the Argentine and even into Bolivia. It was Gerald Errington's preference for hiding himself and his history in the least accessible parts of South America which had made the deception at all possible. Jewel knew that it would be difficult to trace her history even from the date of her marriage, though the certificates she produced were all in order, and she

calculated that the few English people she had met abroad were not likely to cross her path in England. For the rest she trusted to luck—very much as Wagpaw did when he ran for the National.

After the nine days' wonder had been talked out, society forgot her as an unpleasant incident, and welcomed the young man, who had always been popular, back to his own again. The actual details of the discovery of Sydney's sex were carefully suppressed, and beyond an outline in some of the society papers the scandal was treated leniently by the press. The Malbrooks' influence was exerted in this. They did not want Lady Sacharissa Beauman figuring in public in her remarkable disobedience, or as an instrument of Providence in laying bare the fraud. It might have been an unpleasant notoriety for the School as well, however blameless the authorities there, and so the version of the discovery that was generally accepted was that the supposed heir to Errington was out riding and the pony took fright and bolted. The child was not much hurt, only stunned, but his examination by a doctor who was hastily summoned resulted in the exposure of the hoax. The name of the School and the Riding Master never occurred in connection with the story, nor did that of Lady Sweetie.

"If Sweetie once heard that she had been the goddess from the machine we should never, never make her realise her own disgrace," said Lady Malbrook distractedly. "And someone would be sure to let it out. At present she is really subdued—more so than I have ever known her—and she sees that she might have been the cause of the other child's death. It was really a very fortunate thing for Dulcie Vane-Hurst and young Errington!" she added candidly in the same breath.

"Of course we can't send the children back to the

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Riding School," said Lord Malbrook decisively. "Indeed the Master would not have them, I expect."

"Good gracious, no! I would not have them inside the place again—I have told Sweetie that no one will teach her to ride after what she has done! (Of course I am sending all the pupils there that I can: it is only due to him—I mean to the School.) Viva and Sweetie will have to ride with the coachman in the country. I am so nervous now I won't trust them in town."

"It seems rather hard on Viva," said Lord Malbrook thoughtfully. "That imp Sweetie is always spoiling somebody else's show."

"It has been a general upset, and has worried me most dreadfully," Lady Malbrook acknowledged. "Viva has cried herself sick over the whole affair. She begged and prayed to go back just once to say good-bye and tell them how sorry she was—she is ultra-sensitive, and I suppose Sweetie's escapades make her feel involved in some way. I told her nobody could blame her, but that I did not think any of us would be very welcome at the School just now! I really don't, George—I should be ashamed to show my face there!"

"I called and saw the Riding Master that week-end I had to run up to town," said Lord Malbrook quietly. "I felt we owed him a personal expression of regret."

"You didn't!—What did he say?" asked her ladyship curiously.

"Oh, he took it very well. He is a civil, hard-working young fellow, I should think. I was distinctly sorry that the children must be taken out of his hands before I left—a feeling I certainly did not look to have when I braced myself to an apology!"

"Well, they certainly can't go there again—either of them," said Lady Malbrook decisively. "Anstice

says that Viva looks like a ghost, and Sweetie is sullen. I hope they will soon shake down again. Children so quickly get over things."

But it was Lady Malbrook who "got over" it sooner than her daughters, owing to a fortunate litter of puppies from Plym Girl, which distracted her mind and made her oblivious of everything except the date of the forthcoming 'show by the Ladies' Kennel Club. Cousin Anstice had her hands full, what with Sweetie's Ishmael attitude and Viva fretting herself into a feverish state for which she could find no adequate explanation. After her mother's suggestion to her that she would be unwelcome at the Riding School on account of Sweetie's naughtiness, the child did not confess the cause of her tiny tragedy, even to her gentle old cousin. Deep down in her heart she kept the memory of her hero, but she would not ask even to say good-bye to him as he did not want to see her again. The incident passed away from the Beauman children's lives as from the rest of the social world after a time, and Sweetie forgot as soon as she was allowed, and Viva had new enthusiasms, though the impression of the Riding Master was never wholly effaced as that of a kind, strong friend who had stood firm as a rock amongst the more shifty figures of her neurotic childhood. They were destined never to meet again until twelve years later at a great Horse Show a well-known and sporting Earl was present with his wife, the most beautiful Countess in England, and his lordship stopped to congratulate one of the prize-winners, a thick-set fair man in middle age. The beautiful Countess stopped too, perforce, but a second later she made one of her lovely impulsive movements forward, holding out both her hands.

"Oh!" she said with tears and laughter struggling

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in her voice. "I think you taught me to ride when I was a little girl! Are you—Lancelot?"

Mrs Errington left London the night of Sydney's accident—must have left it indeed, it was calculated, but an hour or so after she went to the Riding School. Such women as Jewel Errington, meteors of the social solar system, are ready for sudden flittings and not hampered by their surroundings as are those leading less precarious lives. She was out of England by the time that the story was in Sir Digby's hands and his solicitors began to make inquiries—inquiries soon stopped by the young man himself, who aided the Malbrooks in suppressing the whole matter from the public. The woman Tránsito was left to look after the child, but she had no instructions, and was as helpless as the unfortunate victim of the whole plot—the little girl herself. Sir Digby found himself left to deal with the house in Little Mayfair Street, servants and all, and having paid off the latter and disposed of the lease, he freed himself from all obligations and could enter into his inheritance with a joyful mind—were it not for the fact that his own hand had knotted the scourge for his punishment. He was not bound to fulfil any rash promise he might have made to his cousin's widow; her own actions had tacitly delivered him, and she herself confirmed it. Only, the promise had been made, and in the bitterness of his spirit Digby Errington alone knew what those few weeks of madness had cost him, and would cost him, all his life. The man who borrows of his own youth finds that he has dealt with a merciless usurer, and pays interest that hampers his capital to the end of his life. Sir Digby received one remarkable letter from Jewel Errington that would last him in shame for many years.

It was a heartless letter, written by a woman lashed to wound somebody in revenge for her own smart—but that he did not know. In it she merely asked one thing of him in return for the payment of all debts between them—a revocation flung in his face like the insult of a gauntlet—and that was that he should send her horse Negrito to France to a certain agent. It was the same animal that had nearly killed her in the stable the first time he went to her house—the black horse she habitually rode—he remembered it well. He did as she requested, and without question consigned the horse to the person she mentioned, probably for transmission after his mistress, but this he did not know or care to find out. Jewel passed out of his life, and he never heard more of her career—he knew that it must be a stormy one, he feared fatal for herself and others. There was no effort at prosecution, and such debts as she had contracted he assumed the right to settle as nearest male relative. The solicitors accused him of quixotism. His own conscience accused him of an escape that was too frightful for acknowledgment.

There remained the child, Sydney—or Dolores as she said was her real name. Sir Digby would have eagerly undertaken her maintenance, but the matter was taken out of his hands by a demand from such an unlooked-for quarter that he found himself overruled before he realised it. Lily Devereux wished to adopt the homeless waif, and her reasons were so quietly stated that protest died into shamed whispers. She was a childless woman, she had independent means, it was more suitable that the little girl should be in her care than Sir Digby's and—she meant to do this thing. The only complication was the known scandal with regard to Ainslie Devereux and the woman who had posed as the child's mother,

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and of this no one did more than hint to Lily. As Lady Malbrook had said, they never dared to speak plainly. She went her serene way, and accomplished her project without hindrance or delay, and the little girl passed into her hands as if she were indeed the human chattel she had seemed destined to be by Fate. But Lily's were wise hands, if inexperienced. In spite of passionate protest she dismissed the woman Transito and sent her back to her own country, disliking the association with her, and rightly considering her influence singularly undesirable. The child's name was Dolores Da Costa, her Irish mother having married a Spanish American; but both parents being dead there was little likelihood of any objection being made by her aunt, Jewel Errington, who was her natural guardian. Lily called her Dolly, and by degrees she almost lost her foreign name, which dropped into the forgetfulness of things well passed.

Of one scene that occurred with regard to the adoption the world at large knew nothing, though speculation as to how Ainslie Devereux would take the inclusion of the child in his household was rife, until it was discovered that her adoption was an accomplished fact. Lily Devereux wrote to her husband from Yorkshire, which was her native place and where she had taken the child at once after gaining possession of her. Her letter merely explained her action, and announced her intention of keeping Dolly. He answered the letter in person, but when they stood face to face he knew that he was worsted before he spoke.

"Is this revenge, Lily?"

Her large eyes looked at him as if she hardly caught his meaning. Then she flushed—a slow colour that meant natural indignation.

"I had no such idea," she said coldly. "It was the

loneliness of the child that appealed to me, her helplessness flung on to the world like this, and the certainty that she would not be claimed from me," she added significantly.

"But—this particular child——"

"I owed Mrs Errington a debt!" she said calmly.

He misunderstood, and flushed in his turn.

"Of which you knew nothing," went on his wife. "It lay between us two. My choice fell on this child naturally enough. I am glad to adopt her since I shall never have children of my own."

Her quiet assertion was not a challenge, yet he looked at her almost as if she had thrown down a gage. She met his eyes which had suddenly grown warm and blue. "And that you do not know!" he said in a low tone that was almost unsteady.

She shrank away from him with a sudden disturbance of her calm, a little revulsion at having to recognise the male animal again. "Ainslie," she said deliberately, "it is better we should quite understand each other. Hitherto I have avoided putting things into words, but as this matter of the child has arisen it is an opportunity to speak once and then fall back into the decency of silence. I will never live with you as your wife again. If you prefer it we need not even be under the same roof, though for the sake of appearances I am quite ready to go on as we have for so long. But you must never for a moment think that I shall alter my mind."

He caught his little fair moustache between his teeth in the old way, and the resentment in his face was undisguised. In some strange way she knew that what he resented was the alteration in her, the developed mind and body that had made him desire her again, even more than her refusal to yield to that desire. For a minute

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he seemed inclined to struggle against her denial, thinking perhaps that a woman's "no" meant a man's fighting chance; but the utter repose of her attitude after she had given vent to her ultimatum was more convincing than protest. He knew that there was a stronger will than his own to combat here, and that he was beaten before he spoke. If behind her denial he dimly surmised another personality, he was too much of a gentleman to ask questions even of himself.

"Very well," he said, and his tone was at least as under control as her own. "I am not a beggar to ask favours, Lily. You will get no annoyance from me. Might I warn you of your own position?"

"As how?"

"You are a young woman, married and not married—as you decree—but the world will not know that you are invulnerable however patent it may be to me. The last few months have shown you your own powers, have they not? There are other men besides myself to whom your atmosphere might be—misleading. I am not suggesting that their homage might be a temptation to you, but has it ever struck you that the temptation might lie in yourself?"

"You need be under no apprehension with regard to your name," she answered him slowly. "I have a certain sense of loyalty that would keep me strictly to the vows of marriage so long as we agree to preserve the outward semblance. If I had ever meant to throw off the responsibility I feel towards you, I should have left you openly, and then I might have considered myself free to go my own way. As long as I live in your house you can be assured that I am faithful to the figurative tie that binds us." She turned her face from him suddenly, as one who sees a light afar off. "And as for other

men," she said in a curious hushed voice, "I am bullet proof."

And then he understood, and knew that his case was indeed hopeless.

It is a popular fallacy that when men and women commit conventional sin together it is always the woman who suffers. In the case of such women as Jewel this is by no means the case. It was Digby Errington who suffered from his brief madness with her, but the woman went scot-free, with hardly a thought flung back to him. Jewel's experiences were so simply physical that they left no mental mark on her at all. The occasion on which she did suffer was before a tribunal of her senses—the only one she knew—when she was repulsed by the man on whom, though he was not of her class, she had set her heart. Then indeed it was her turn to pay in thwarted desires and bitter humiliation—an outrage of body and mind together. But for Sir Digby she suffered nothing, nor could she have understood the burden that she thrust upon him. His punishment began when he found himself free, denuded of the poor satisfaction of righting himself in his own eyes, with no compensation demanded of him for his folly save the bitter judgment of his better self. The report of his marrying Jewel Errington had never reached Dulcie. Her faith in him was unshaken, and by some strange freak of nature he loathed himself the more for that. He paid and paid again every time he met her clear eyes, saddened a little by the experience that had come to her during the short space they had been parted, and had to listen to her sensitive confidences.

"Teddy has gone to India—and I am glad, Digby!" she whispered in the safe comfort of his arms. "Does it not sound impossible? He won't be back for years

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—perhaps he may take his leave shooting in the Himalayas even—and yet I am almost relieved. Oh, it was so dreadful——”

“My poor pet!” he said helplessly, facing the point of view of extreme youth and girlhood with a man’s despair. “You must not blame human nature too much——”

“It might have been a tragedy!” Dulcie reminded him gravely. “When we were down at Plym together I felt as if I could not breathe the same air with her at times! And then that dreadful moment when Teddy came——”

“Dear,” he said in desperation, “why need you dwell on it all? After all it was a friendship and no more. You see yourself that nothing came of it.”

“But—but—you don’t know—I felt it was *real*! That morning we went cubbing—Teddy had promised to go with me, and he never came near me!” (He almost smiled at the incredulity of the Spoilt Child, but his private tragedy shadowed the merriment.) “They were lost on the Moor—for hours. And then Lily—Mrs Devereux—came home alone, and Teddy never turned up to dinner, and wired to say he had gone back to town. I suppose he had some spark of common-sense at the last moment,” she added, with the faint resentment still haunting her voice.

“Don’t you think you might give the woman some credit—supposing they really did come to open speaking?”

“She?” said Dulcie scornfully. “Do you think any woman would send Teddy away? Or that he would let a woman rule him? Why, even I have never been able to manage Teddy entirely.” (We think we know our men-folk, until a stranger proves the fallacy.) “She may have been frightened, perhaps. Do you know, I think sometimes that I must have shown her what everyone

felt? I daresay I was so furious that I made her frightened."

He thought of the woman who had so calmly taken the child Dolores from him into her own firm keeping, and gasped a little at Dulcie's self-deception. "I do not think that anything would—frighten Mrs Devereux, once she made up her mind!" he said.

"Ah, but you don't know—her conscience may have awakened too!" said Dulcie, quite unconscious of her self-righteousness.

"Well, anyhow it's all over now. Let's forget about it, sweet——"

"Yes—only—it made me feel older somehow. I lost faith in Teddy—almost in myself!" said the girl with a restless movement of pain. "The only thing left me was you, Digby!" she added softly. "I never lost faith in you."

Now Nemesis struck with her sheathless sword, and struck true. The girl had laid her head upon her lover's breast, and could not see the grey face above her. He was a man, with a man's excuses to lay before the arraignment of his fellow-men; but he knew that, could the case be laid before the standard of girlhood, he must plead guilty only, and hope for no more than brief condemnation.

"Please God I never will fail your faith in me, my darling!" was all he found to say with shaking lips, and he heard the Recording Angel close the book on his own poor pledge, and almost prayed that some merciful distraction might stop his torture and turn her thoughts in another direction. It seemed like an answer when she next spoke, after a little pause that was happy for her at least.

"I wonder what he thought of it all?"

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"He?"

"The Riding Master at my school. I always did wonder how we struck him, Digby. He was so curiously mixed up in it all, and yet he only saw bits of the play, and he must have quite lost the thread at times."

"I don't suppose it interested him much. It's not his life, y'know."

"I know. And yet—one can never tell with him. He saw almost all of us who have been concerned in your losing Errington" (to Miss Dulcie this was inevitably the crux of the story) "and now that it has all come right he won't even see any of us again, very likely."

"Well, isn't that right for the end of the story? One lays down the book, you know—and there it is!"

"But the reader forms his own opinion!" she said quickly. "I wonder if he were at all interested in us!"

"That," said Sir Digby, with conviction, "we shall never know."

There was never quiet for long in the Riding School, from early morning when work began, to late into the evening when the lessons sometimes ran on for the benefit of City men who could not get away before, and even then, when the School was still and the tan deserted, came the nagsmen to break in a green horse, or to gallop a new purchase. For a nagsmen is one who breaks and trains a green horse, and gives the final polish to a made one. He is not, properly speaking, a horse-breaker, for he need not undertake to drive a green horse, though he probably can. His place is on a horse's back, where he must remain in spite of casualties. He may, however, be designated a rough-rider with good reason. There was always something going on between the dusky brown

walls of the School, and the work frequently lasted up to eleven at night.

It was not among the Riding Master's duties, properly speaking, to handle raw horses, but he frequently did so if he were desirous of giving one good manners for the School. On a September afternoon—possibly the very time when Miss Dulcie was speculating as to his point of view—he might have been seen riding slowly round and round the tan, handling his mount with the same iron patience that he displayed with his pupils, though on this occasion he was quite alone. The lights were not yet turned on, and there was no lesson for another hour, when Durban would take an unpromising gentleman whose acquaintance with horses consisted hitherto in knowing that they pulled his 'bus to the City. The Riding Master had been away for that three weeks' holiday of which he had spoken to Lady Viva Beauman, and was unusually sunburned. The tan indeed extended from the line of his hat, pressed down over his rebellious hair and startling forehead, even to the very white collar that made him rather immaculate; but it is uncertain that his thoughts were lingering on the past liberty which he had enjoyed, any more than that they were likely to be focussed on the broken threads of the tangle in which so many of his pupils and their friends had been meshed. When there was a thing to do the Riding Master's capabilities and energies were concentrated upon it, and the thing of the moment was to induce a reluctant horse to pace evenly close to the wall, and to understand what was required of him. It was the same story that had been so many times before, and would be so many times again, for duty is very apt to move in a circle. Heels down, knees in, a tactful pressure on the rein, and that habitual knowledge of every movement of the horse that

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had grown to be instinct, went the Riding Master, his shoulders very square and his expression no more abstracted than when he bent his face to a new pupil. The pleasant autumn afternoon had been sunny, and even now the reflection of the vanished sun warmed the old brown walls and the solitary figure, so alert with life, so controlled within the precincts of the monotonous walls that seemed to bound his existence. The light showed the concentrated young face set upon the task just now in his capable hands, and gave no least hint of reminiscence or imagination. And Miss Dulcie's speculation, "I wonder what he thought of us all?" is best answered by Sir Digby's, "That we shall never know."

It is probable that the Riding Master was a very material young man, living a commonplace life among commonplace surroundings. It is certain that he read *The Daily Mirror*, and was interested in steeplechasing, though he might not bet. Yet because he did the duty nearest him with singleness of heart, and so left no room for dissatisfaction, he came within the struggling sphere of Mrs Devereux's motley ideal. Only, he knew it not. And if he felt, he felt as in a dream, the great patience of the Universe, waiting for God.

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The Amours of Henri de Navarre and of Marguerite de Valois. Lieut.-Colonel ANDREW C. P. HAGGARD, D.S.O. Author of "Sidelights on the Court of France" [see page 14], "Sporting Yarns," "The Regent of the Roués," etc. In one volume, demy 8vo, cloth gilt, with Photogravure Frontispiece and 16 full-page Illustrations printed on art paper, 16s. net.

Henri IV. of France, whose renown as a warrior is so well deserved, was also one of the most libertine princes of a libertine age. From youth until well on in middle age, his roving fancy was for ever being caught by the turn of a well-shaped ankle or the snowy frill of what Herrick calls "the tempestuous petticoat." It is of many of the fair and frail companions of Henri de Navarre that Colonel Andrew Haggard gives us most interesting details in this work, to obtain which he has sought for and consulted the records of contemporary chroniclers but little known to-day.

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SOME EARLY PRESS OPINIONS

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[*Ready Spring, 1911*

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